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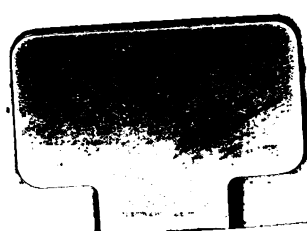

MISCELLANEOUS

SERMONS,

BY THE LATE

REV. HUGH STOWELL,

RECTOR OF BALLAUGH, ISLE OF MAN, AUTHOR OF THE LIFE OF BISHOP WILSON, &c.

LONDON:

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M DCCC XXXVII.

547.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It ought to be stated, that though most of the sermons comprised in this volume had been set apart by their venerable author with a view to publication, none of them had received the finishing touches of his experienced hand. A few verbal alterations are all that they have undergone from the friends who furnish them to the press. They are given to the church in accordance with the intimated wish of him who once delivered them with such glowing pathos, as well as in compliance with the solicitations of many who revered and loved him.

It was suggested that a brief memoir should accompany these discourses, but as a more extended portrait is in progress, the suggestion has not been adopted.

Should this little volume of sermons be favourably received, it will probably be succeeded by a second.

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Daniel's seventy weeks were drawing to a close. At length The Desire of all nations arrived. The Prince of Peace was born. Angels proclaimed his birth, and wise men from the east came to worship him. These highly-favoured individuals were guided by a star to the place where the Saviour lay: "And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

From these words I shall take occasion, in humble reliance on Divine assistance, to shew,

I. The certainty of the birth of our Divine Redeemer.

II. The necessity of coming to Him with a lively faith. And,

III. The blessedness of thus coming to Him.

I. There is no event which has occurred in the years that are past of which we have fuller assurance than we have that our Lord Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, about eighteen hundred years ago. A series of prophecies, commencing from the fall of our first parents, and carried on through all the intermediate ages till within a short period of the birth of our Lord,

points to this event. Every one of these prophecies has been remarkably fulfilled. The exact time in which the Messiah should appear was declared. The messenger who was to go before his face to prepare the way before him, the tribe from which he was to descend, the city in which he was to be born, the meanness, and yet the grandeur of his appearing, were all foretold. The Son who was to be given, though he was to have no form nor comeliness, and no beauty that we should desire him, was yet to be called "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." He who came to visit us in great humility and took upon him the form of a servant, was the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person. Angels proclaimed his birth, and the sons of God shouted for joy at his appearing. A new star in the firmament silently but powerfully declared that the day-spring from on high had visited the world, and that *He* was come whose goings forth have been from everlasting. This star guided the wise men from the east to the very spot where the young child lay; and when they beheld the Babe, they fell down and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

The arrival of these eastern sages in Jerusalem reached the ears of Herod on his throne, and he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. His fears of being dethroned by him who was born King of the Jews, led him to send forth and slay all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. This bloody decree has given us additional evidence of a Saviour's birth, by connecting it with so memorable an event in history.

Thus, my brethren, we have the testimony of prophets, the testimony of wise men from the east, the testimony of angels, and the tesiimony of God himself, to confirm that true and faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. There is no ground therefore to doubt the truth of the great event which we commemorate at this* sacred season. Our assembling within these walls at the present hour points to the birth of a Saviour. Had he never been born, no Christian temple would ever have been erected—no Christian sabbath would ever have been observed—no Christian ordinances would ever have been appointed. None of us would have been baptized into the name

* Preached at Christmas.

of Jesus, and none of us would have looked for redemption through his blood. If we go back, my brethren, in the records of history a few years before the birth of our Lord, there is no trace of Christianity to be found; but immediately after his appearing in the flesh the glad tidings of salvation began to sound throughout the world, thousands and tens of thousands acknowledged him as their Redeemer, multitudes laid down their lives for his sake, churches were erected to his glory, whole nations confessed him as their Lord, and flocked around the standard of his cross. Every blind man whom he restored to sight, every lame man whom he healed, the evil spirits which he cast out, and the dead which he raised, all testify that this is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Saviour of the world.

II. There is an absolute necessity of coming to this precious Saviour by a true and living faith. The same page which informs us that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head informs us of our lost and ruined condition. Our hearts inform us of this. The corruption of our nature is interwoven with every fibre of our frame. The sins of our youth and the crimes of our riper years testify this corruption. However blameless our life may appear in the sight of men, yet in the sight of a heart-searching Judge

we are constrained to plead guilty. When weighed in the balance of the sanctuary all are found wanting. This is the case not only of the abandoned sinner, but of the most amiable of the children of men. All are alike shapen in iniquity and born in sin. What would have become of us, my beloved brethren, had not our Heavenly Father, in his tender mercy, provided a sacrifice for our sins, and sent his only-begotten Son into the world to taste death for every man? In this all-sufficient Saviour there is plenteous redemption. All are invited to come to him; but how are we to come? We must come as the wise men from the east came, with lively faith. Their faith was simple as the faith of a child, and yet so strong that nothing could shake it, not the meanness of the Saviour's appearance, not the poverty of his condition, nor the contempt with which he was treated by the world. When the wise men arrived at Jerusalem they must have expected to find the Royal Babe cradled in a magnificent palace, surrounded with a retinue of servants, and adorned with the most costly robes. They must have expected to find the whole city rejoicing at the appearance of their new-born King; but how different from all this were the circumstances attending the birth of the Saviour. The inhabitants of Jerusalem knew not that he

was born—no interest was felt—no rejoicing prevailed—all was contrary to what might have been expected. No pomp, no grandeur marked the birth of Jesus. A stable was his birth-place, and a manger his cradle. Well might the wise men have exclaimed, Is this the King of the Jews?—The Deliverer of his people—The Glory of Israel?—but no such exclamations escaped them. They saw, they believed, they worshipped. In this despised Babe they beheld "the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Under this obscure form they perceived the Redeemer of mankind—that compassionate Redeemer "who, being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich." They acknowledged the Majesty of the Most High under the cloud which shadowed it, and with deep humility fell down and worshipped. We, too, must seek the Saviour as they did, with lively faith, with earnest enquiry, with persevering diligence. They hesitated not to take a long and expensive journey to pay homage to the new-born King. They came from far. They left their friends, their home, their country, to seek the Saviour. A star guided them to the place where he lay. We, too, have a star to guide us to the Saviour. His word is that star. We are not required to travel to distant lands to find

him, "for the word is nigh unto us, even in our mouth, and in our heart." The wise men resolved to seek till they should find. They anxiously enquired, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? Thus, too, must we persevere in seeking till we find. "Then shall we know," saith the Prophet, "if we follow on to know the Lord." But never can we find the Saviour by any wisdom or strength of our own. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." It is this blessed Spirit who leads sinners to the Saviour. It is he who opens their eyes to see their need of a Saviour, and it is he who shews them the fulness and freeness of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It is he who renews them after the Divine Image, and makes them meet for glory. Whatever means or instruments he may be pleased to employ, whether stars, or prophecies, or ministers, still the work is his own. It is he who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. All, therefore, who would find the Saviour must earnestly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and follow where he leads the way. The wise men from the east have shewn us how we should approach the Saviour; "When they saw the young child, with Mary his mother, they fell down, and worshipped him." Thus, too, must we fall down and

worship before our Divine Redeemer. We must glorify him in our bodies and in our souls. The wise men first presented themselves to the Saviour, and then offered gifts unto him, "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." We, too, must first present ourselves a living sacrifice, and next devote all our talents to his service. If we are not rich in this world's goods, if we have no gold, nor frankincense, nor myrrh to offer, yet let us give such things as we have. He who marked with approbation the two mites which the poor widow cast into the treasury will not despise our offerings. Nearly does it concern us to devote all that we have, and all that we are, to his service, who hath bought us with his precious blood. Nearly does it concern us to fly to his cross, and cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, if we would obtain the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.

III. The blessedness of thus coming to the Saviour next calls for our attention. When the wise men saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. They had now arrived at the end of their journey. They had reached the spot where the object of their search lay, and their souls did magnify the Lord, and their spirits rejoiced in God their Saviour.

The Saviour is the true source of joy. Till

we come to him all is darkness, misery, and sin. Till we come to him we are exposed to the accusations of a guilty conscience, to the anger of an offended God, and the terrors of an approaching judgment; but when we fly to the cross of the Saviour, when we become his true followers, united to him by a living faith, washed in his precious blood, and clothed in the robes of his righteousness, our sins are blotted out, and our pardon is sealed in heaven. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The reception of the Saviour is attended with immediate joy. We read that Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them, and there was great joy in that city. No sooner did the jailer at Philippi believe in the Lord Jesus Christ than he rejoiced with all his house; and from the hour in which the Ethiopian Eunuch found the Saviour, "he went on his way rejoicing." Every hope of obtaining an interest in this precious Saviour will give joy to the humble enquirer. He will not be offended at finding him in the cottages of the poor, or in the abodes of affliction. Wherever he finds him he will share in the feelings of the wise men from the east. He will rejoice with exceeding great joy. When the awakened sinner first beholds his Saviour with

the eye of faith, fainting, bleeding, dying for his redemption, and is enabled to look to Him as all his salvation and all his desire, he feels a peace "which passeth all understanding." The believer, too, who, after a dark night of temptation, begins to find the day-star from on high arise in his heart, is constrained to exclaim with the Prophet, "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me." It is the office of the Saviour "to bind up the broken-hearted, to give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." How is it, then, my brethren, that so many of his followers seem to walk in darkness, and go on their way weeping? One reason of this is, that they look to themselves more than to their Saviour. They want to discover in themselves some good thing on which they may build their hope of salvation; but in vain do they look for peace, or pardon, or salvation, in any of their doings. The spirit of truth points out a far different way of obtaining these blessings. "Acquaint now thyself with him," says he, "and be at peace." Look to the Saviour of sinners, and be saved. Take of the water of life freely. Buy wine and milk, without money and without price. The Christian's joy does not arise from his good

heart, or his good frames, or his good deeds. It does not arise from any thing that he has done or can do, but entirely from what Christ has done. When he can say in sincerity of heart—

> "Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to thy cross I cling,"

then will he find the cross a source of purest joy and sweetest consolation.

Another reason why many of the followers of the Saviour do not rejoice with exceeding great joy is, that they do not walk closely and humbly with their God. Their faith is wavering, their obedience is interrupted, they have left their first love. They are slumbering on their watch. No wonder, therefore, that they should lose the joy which they once possessed. No wonder that the light of their Father's countenance should no longer shine upon their path. Is this the case of any of my hearers? I would earnestly entreat them to try their ways, and turn again unto the Lord, to come again to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and to resolve henceforth, in simple dependence on the influences of the Holy Spirit, to live more than ever by the faith of the Son of God, who loved them and gave himself for them. So shall peace return to their disquieted minds, and joy once more fill

their drooping hearts. In no other way can they find rest to their souls. The world is embittered to them; its follies and its vanities have lost their power to charm. They have found out the deception. They know that wherever happiness is to be found, it is not to be found in the false fleeting pleasures of a world which smiles but to destroy. The awful realities of eternity have been disclosed to their view. They have tasted the powers of the world to come. They have seen the riches of divine grace, and felt the consolations of divine love, and now nothing upon earth can fill the aching void which they experience within. They are constrained to exclaim with the Psalmist, "O satisfy us with thy mercy, and that soon, so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life." You see, therefore, my beloved brethren, where, and where alone, we must look for true enjoyment. Christ is the spring of all our joys. In union and communion with him we shall find all our desires satisfied, and all our hopes accomplished.

The star which was seen in the east pointed to this precious Saviour. That word which was given to be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths, points to this precious Saviour. Its prophecies point to him. Its promises point to him. Its types and sacrifices point to him. All seem to speak the

SERMON II.

ACTS XIII. 39.

And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

"How should man be just with God?" is one of the most important enquiries which can engage the human mind. It involves the hopes of sinners in time and in eternity. To this interesting enquiry the Apostle in my text gives the only satisfactory answer which can be given. He was addressing an assembly in the synagogue at Antioch on the Sabbath day, and after taking a general view of God's dealings with the children of Israel, from the time of their departure out of Egypt, he proceeds to preach Jesus and the resurrection. He directs his hearers to this all-sufficient Saviour as their only refuge. "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from

which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

May the Holy Spirit, without whose aid our preaching is in vain, and your hearing is also in vain, accompany us with his special blessing whilst we proceed to consider,

I. The impossibility of being justified by the law of Moses.
II. The true method of justification; and,
III. The right application of the subject.

I. To justify implies to pronounce the accused person free from blame, to absolve and declare him innocent. It is to acquit him from every charge brought against him, and to regard him as if he had never been accused. Let us enquire whether sinners can be thus justified by the law of Moses. The law requires perfect, absolute, and uninterrupted obedience. Its language to every child of man is, "Do this and live." "The soul that sinneth it shall die" The thunders of Mount Sinai proclaim the fearful condition of those who in any one instance transgress the holy commandment, "cursed is every one who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." When tried by this standard, my brethren, where is the individual who can be justified before God? where is the individual who is not only holy in the tenor of his life, but harmless

and blameless, at all times and in all places, from the beginning to the end of his pilgrimage upon earth, who continueth not merely in the discharge of particular duties, or in the exercise of particular graces, but "in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them?" No such individual can be found amongst the fallen, guilty, ruined race of men. He who, at any time, has transgressed the law of God, either in thought, word, or deed, can no longer be justified by the law. His future obedience, however perfect, cannot atone for his past transgression, but he stands before the heart-searching Judge as a condemned criminal. "What is man that he should be clean, and he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous. Behold he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. He chargeth the very angels with folly." Our best works fall far short of perfection, and therefore cannot be the ground of our justification either in whole or in part. Bring the most perfect of the sons of men to the bar of Divine Justice—try him by the law of God in all its spirituality and in all its extent — that law which reacheth to the thoughts and intents of the heart, that law which requireth truth in the inward parts and condemneth every sinful desire, and every unhallowed imagination—and will he dare to

plead—"not guilty?" "If he justify himself, his own mouth shall condemn him." What says the spirit of truth. "There is none righteous, no not one." The consciences of men confirm this truth, and silently testify that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." How then can the sinner be justified by the law of Moses? He cannot be justified by the moral law, for he has broken it in innumerable instances, nor can he be justified by the ceremonial law, because it is impossible that "the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins," should satisfy the justice of God, or heal the wounded conscience of the sinner. The law accuses, judges, condemns, but can never justify. It represents all mankind as rebels against God, and constrains every individual of the human race who sees his true condition, to say with the Psalmist—"Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." The sinner can have no hope of obtaining justification by that law which he has so often broken. His own heart condemns him; then how can he find acceptance with him "who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins?" where can he flee for deliverance from the wrath to come? where can he repair for refuge from the vengeance which pursues him? If he say in his heart "I will repent of my sins, and will

offend no more"—can his repentance make atonement for his past transgression?—can his future obedience discharge the debt which he has already contracted? Though rivers of tears should incessantly flow from his eyes, they could never wash away his guilt, and though he were henceforth to "abound in every work of faith, and labour of love," his former offences would still remain uncancelled and justly expose him to "indignation, and wrath, tribulation and anguish." Since no flesh therefore can be justified by the deeds of the law, the enquiry "How should man be just with God," returns upon us, and leads us to consider—

II. The true method of justification. "By him all who believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Here, my brethren, we are taught how alone we can be justified, even through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. This precious Saviour has paid the debt which we could never pay. He has made the atonement which we could never make. He has fulfilled the law which we have broken, he has endured the punishment which we had deserved, "he has borne our sins in his own body on the tree," and suffered in our stead, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." He was wounded for our trans-

gressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace "was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." We are accepted in the Beloved, and justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in him. The righteousness whereby we are justified is wholly independent of our works, whether past, present, or future. It is again and again called "the righteousness of God," because God hath provided it for us, and accepted it on our behalf. It is the method which he hath adopted for justifying the ungodly. The free grace of God is the source of our justification. His boundless mercy found out a way for sinners to escape when by their disobedience they had most justly provoked his wrath and indignation against them. The stupendous plan of redemption was formed in the divine counsels before the worlds began. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The righteousness which this precious Saviour hath wrought out becomes ours by faith. Here, my brethren, is the great instrument of obtaining the blessings of redemption. By him all that believe are "justified from all things." All that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ heartily, sincerely, and effectually, receiving him in all his offices, trusting wholly and exclusively to his merits,

are justified from all things, from the guilt of all their past sins, however numerous and however aggravated. Their pardon is sealed in heaven, and they are accounted righteous in the sight of God. Justification is represented in Scripture as immediate and complete from the moment that the sinner truly believes in the Saviour. In this great concern works of every kind are excluded. We are required simply to come to our Redeemer with a deep conviction of our lost and ruined condition, to trust in his merits, and rely on him wholly and entirely for pardon and salvation. As our Church clearly and scripturally asserts, "We are accounted righteous only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings." Through Jesus alone is the remission of sins. By his death it was purchased, in his name it is offered, and by his authority it is bestowed. "By grace ye are saved, through faith." We are saved through faith, as the principle which unites us to Christ, by whose righteousness alone we are justified. Never can we be justified by our good works, because we can perform no works which are truly good till we are justified. Our very best works, so far from justifying us, do themselves need atonement. The believer looks not for that in himself which is to be

found in Christ alone, nor for that in the law which is to be found in the Gospel alone. The law shews him his disease, the Gospel his remedy; the law pronounces his condemnation, the Gospel proclaims his redemption; the law is the word of wrath, the Gospel is the word of reconciliation. This precious word declares that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," and "that he so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Our divine Redeemer himself declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"—"no man cometh unto the Father but by me." And the Apostle Paul declareth, that "Jesus is made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption"—"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Our vileness commends God's love. The abundance of his mercy and the riches of his grace will be magnified in every redeemed sinner to all eternity. On Christ alone the hope of the guilty hangs. In him the vilest sinners find pardon. Jesus interposes in their behalf. Atonement is made for their transgressions, and all their sins are blotted out.

God's justice, my brethren, in pardoning sinners is as conspicuous as his mercy. He

has exacted of his Son the uttermost farthing of our debt. "He hath laid on him the iniquities of us all," and now he is faithful and just in forgiving our sins, and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. He is faithful to his promise in pardoning penitent believers, and he is just in delivering the captives, for whom an abundant ransom has been paid. God justifies sinners in the way which contributes most to his own glory. He can now pardon, honourably pardon, all who apply to him for pardon in his appointed way. "He can now be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." We must seek every thing in and through this precious Saviour, that the loftiness of man may be laid low, and that the Lord alone may be exalted. The holiest of men have nothing whereof to glory before God. We find Abraham, the father of the faithful, so far from accounting himself righteous before God, exclaiming, "Behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." We find Job, a man who feared God, and eschewed evil, speaking with abhorrence of justifying himself before his Maker. "How should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." We find Isaiah, that distinguished prophet, who had such clear

and bright visions of the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, lamenting that he was "vile," "that he was a man of unclean lips," and that he dwelt amongst a people of unclean lips. We find St. Paul, who was not a whit behind the chiefest Apostles, acknowledging himself to be "the chief of sinners," and desiring to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith; and all the countless multitudes of saints in glory join in the everlasting song, "Worthy is the Lamb." All cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus.

We are not justified, my brethren, on account of any merit in ourselves, in our works, or in our faith, but wholly on account of the merits of our Redeemer. All our salvation is in him. It is begun in him, it is continued in him, it is ended in him. As he is "the Author," so is he the Finisher of our faith. As he is the Author, so is he the Finisher of our salvation. In order to obtain salvation, however, he expressly requires us to believe in him. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," says he, "so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." And again, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Faith is available to our justification,

of boasting from the holiest of men, and all grounds of despair from the most abandoned. Precious are the fruits of a true and living faith. It secures the pardon of sin. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins." It produces peace with God. "Being justified by faith," we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. It gives victory over the world. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." It gives "joy unspeakable and full of glory." "In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;" and, lastly, it secures the salvation of the soul. "But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Thus we see the true method of justification, "By him all that believe are justified from all things."

III. We come now to apply the subject. Represent to yourselves, my brethren, a malefactor condemned by the laws of his country, confined to a dark and noisome prison, loaded with chains, and every moment expecting the officers of justice to convey him to the place of execution; his heart is smitten within him—the groan of despair bursts from his breast—the tolling bell seems to strike upon his ear, and all the terrors of death are present to his view. At this tremendous

hour a messenger arrives, and presents the culprit with a pardon from his sovereign. What words can describe the transports of his joy! Behold in this affecting scene a lively representation of the sinner's case. He too is condemned by the law of the Majesty of the Universe—he too is "tied and bound with the chain of his sins," the sword of divine justice is unsheathed, and the bottomless pit is yawning to receive him. In the anguish of his spirit he exclaims, "What must I do to be saved?" Where shall I look for deliverance? The Saviour of sinners comes to his relief, presents him with a blood-bought pardon, and cries aloud, "Look unto me and be saved"—"Behold my pierced hands, and feet, and side, and know that it was for thee and such as thee that I endured these wounds, that I suffered, bled, and died —then be not faithless, but believing." The sinner casts himself down at the cross of his Saviour—repents—believes—is pardoned, and justified. These inestimable benefits are offered to all. To YOU, my brethren, is the word of this salvation sent. In every Christian assembly throughout the world the voice of the compassionate Redeemer utters the invitation, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." None, however, come to the Saviour till they

feel their need of him, till they are convinced of their lost and ruined condition, and see that they are utterly helpless in themselves. Then indeed the Saviour is precious unto them, then do they cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, and embrace him in all his offices, as "all their salvation, and all their desire." Is it thus with you, my brethren? Have you seen yourselves condemned by the righteous law of God, and fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you? Do you trust for salvation wholly and exclusively to the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ? Can you trace the effects of a living faith on your hearts and lives? Has it transformed you into the image of your Redeemer? Have you imbibed his spirit, and are you walking in his steps? These are enquiries of high importance. A confident assurance of salvation, without holiness of heart and life, is not faith, but presumption. The faith which saves, first justifies, then sanctifies, and, lastly, glorifies. If there be amongst my hearers any who are yet strangers to this living faith, any who have never felt the burden of their sins, nor seen the danger of their condition, I would beseech them, by the mercies of God, to pause, and enquire, "what are we doing, and whither are we going? Is the Gospel which we are neglecting a cunningly devised fable,

or is it the "power of God unto salvation?" "Are the terrors of the Lord empty sounds, or are they awful realities? If they be indeed awful realities, what is our condition? Whither shall we flee from the wrath to come?" Whenever this enquiry proceeds from a broken and a contrite heart, the spirit of truth returns for answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin." Let none therefore despair of pardon. Mark the "unsearchable riches of Christ," the power of his resurrection, the prevalence of his intercession, the grace of his spirit, and the greatness of his salvation, and then say whether he be not both able and willing "to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him." The salvation which he has purchased can, however, neither be valued nor understood, nor embraced by those who do not see and feel themselves to be lost and ruined sinners; but to all such as do, he offers free, plenteous, and complete redemption. Why then should any hesitate to embrace the gracious offer? Never can we find rest, or peace, or hope, or joy till we be united to this precious Saviour by a true and living faith. This the experience of thousands and tens of thousands in every age of the world has abundantly testified. May I be permitted, my brethren, to call your attention, in an especial

manner to the case of one of the sweet singers in our Israel,* who when overwhelmed with grief, on the very verge of despair, found acceptance in the Beloved, and free justification through his atoning blood. For many years he was so heavy laden with the burden of his sins, that life became intolerable to him, and "his soul chose strangling and death rather than life." At length his burden was removed, and the Lord lifted up the light of his countenance upon him, and visited him with his salvation. Hearken to his own interesting account of this blessed change. "The happy period which was to shake off my fetters, and afford me a clear discovery of the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus was now arrived. I flung myself into a chair near the window, and seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first words which I saw were *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God.* Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the sun of righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the

* William Cowper, Esq.

atonement he had made for my pardon and complete justification. In a moment I believed, and received the peace of the Gospel—'that peace which passeth all understanding.'" Such will be the happy experience of all who apply to the Saviour for mercy and pardon, for grace and salvation. But this application must be made without delay. "*Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.*" Much of the accepted time is already past with many of us—with some the day of salvation is drawing to a close—and with all it is passing swiftly away. Are there amongst us any who are yet in an unpardoned and unconverted state?—Oh! let them hearken to the voice of mercy "to-day while it is called to-day," crying to them individually, "*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*" "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

To those of my hearers who have already built their hopes for eternity on the rock of ages, I would say, rejoice with exceeding great joy, and "shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." "Walk worthy of the high vocation wherewith you are called." Prove to all around you the reality of your

faith by the holiness of your conversation. Like faithful Abraham be ready to do, or to suffer, or to be whatever the Lord is pleased to appoint for you. Be strong in faith, giving glory to God. "Shine as lights in the world, endure unto the end," and when that end approaches, be ready to join in the prayer of one of the holiest of men, and one of the brightest ornaments of our venerable church, in the near views of death and eternity*—"Where I have failed, Lord show mercy to me, for I plead not my righteousness, but the forgiveness of my unrighteousness, through his merits who died to purchase pardon for penitent sinners—and since I owe thee a death, Lord, let it not be terrible, and then choose thy own time, I submit to it—Let not mine, O Lord, but thy will be done."

* Hooker.

SERMON III.

MARK IX. 24.

Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

THE gospel "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It exhibits the Saviour to our view in a great variety of lights; at one time teaching the people with authority, and speaking as never man spake, and at another working divers miracles, commanding the winds and the seas, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease amongst the people, cleansing the lepers, and raising the dead. We often behold him exercising his resistless power over evil spirits, and casting them out by his word. A remarkable instance of this kind occurs in the interesting narrative which now calls for your attention.

We read that a certain man came to our Lord, and brought unto him his son who was grievously tormented. The account which the father gives of his afflicted child is deeply affecting. "Master," said he, "I

have brought unto thee my son who hath a dumb spirit, and wheresoever he taketh him he teareth him, and he foameth and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away." What a mournful spectacle is here! No wonder that the bowels of the father should have yearned over his unhappy child, and that he should have felt the most earnest desire for his relief. How cheering, therefore, must have been the command of the Saviour, "Bring him unto me; and they brought him unto him, and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, how long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child, and ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire and into the waters to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." May the Holy Spirit be amongst us while we proceed to consider,

I. The manner of this petition.
II. Its subject; and,
III. Its success.

I. The *manner* in which this distressed

parent applied to our blessed Lord was *earnest and fervent*. Tears accompanied his words. He spoke out of the abundance of his heart; his spirit was troubled within him. He saw the wretched and helpless state of his child, and he was resolved, if possible, to obtain relief for him. He asks with the earnestness of one who would take no denial. His tears spoke more forcibly than his words. They disclosed the strong emotions which prevailed in his breast, and silently expressed the unutterable feelings of parental love. The manner of his asking was not only earnest but *deeply affecting*. It bore the impression of real distress, and genuine affection. It was, moreover, *humble* and *devout*. He represented his faith as so small and weak, that it deserved rather to be termed unbelief. He spoke as one who was sensible of his own vileness, and convinced of his own unworthiness. He approached our Lord with a broken and a contrite heart, and as one who had nothing to plead in his behalf but the wretchedness of his case. Such was *the manner* of his petition.

II. *The subject* of it was infinitely important. "Help thou mine unbelief." This distressed parent had just heard from the lips of the Saviour that his faith was essentially necessary to the recovery of his child. "If thou canst believe, all things are

possible to him that believeth." The humble supplicant could say in the sincerity of his heart, "Lord, I believe," but he was conscious that his faith was weak, that it was mingled with doubts and fears, that it was wavering between his conviction of the apparently desperate condition of his child, and his persuasion of the ability of the Saviour to deliver him. There was a degree of hesitation in his petition. "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us." His language was not that of the centurion, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." It was not that of the leper, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," but it was the language of one who hoped and yet feared—of one who sued for relief, and yet trembled lest his petition would not, or could not be granted. No wonder, therefore, that he should have cried out with tears, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

Here is a prayer of unspeakable importance. The highest blessings of time and of eternity are suspended on our believing the ability and willingness of the Saviour to relieve us. Often do we find our blessed Lord requiring faith in those who applied to him for relief. "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" and sometimes he commends the faith of those who applied

to him. To the Canaanitish woman he says, "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt;" and of the centurion who applied to him for his sick servant, he saith, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." We read that when he came into his own country, "he could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief." There is nothing more frequently required throughout the whole of the Gospel than a steadfast and lively faith. The answer given to the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The same important truth was uttered by our Lord himself; "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life;" and we are informed that the great end of publishing the Gospel was to lead sinners to believe in the Saviour. "These are written," saith the beloved disciple, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."

The Gospel is offered to a perishing world as a sure and never-failing remedy. It points to the balm which is in Gilead, and to the Physician who is there. It offers free, plenteous, and complete redemption to penitent believers. What, therefore, can more

nearly concern us than to believe with our hearts, and to confess with our mouths, that the eternal Son of God is the Redeemer of mankind, that he was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification, and that he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Faith is the root of all holy obedience. We are justified by faith, we are sanctified by faith, we live by faith. Whilst faith purifieth the heart, it overcometh the world, and worketh by love. Whilst it relieth solely and exclusively on the merits of the Saviour, it aboundeth in every good word and work. The faith which produces these effects is not a bare assent to the truth of the Gospel. It is not a confident expectation that we shall obtain redemption through the merits of the Saviour without any just grounds for such expectation; but it is the cordial acceptance of that precious Saviour in all his offices; the relying on his atonement, and following his example; the living by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us.

The imperfection of our faith is the secret cause of the imperfection of all our graces. Many a blessing, both temporal and spiritual, do we forfeit by our unbelief. Rich and abundant mercies are purchased for us, and freely offered to us, but we must stretch forth the hand of faith to receive them. If this

hand be weak, and feeble, and withered, though the mercies be within our reach we shall be unable to lay hold on them. The voice of the Redeemer says to each of us, "According to thy faith be it unto thee." Wonderful have been the effects of a true and living faith in every period of the world. See the father of the faithful, at the command of the most High, quitting his home and the land of his nativity, and going forth he knew not whither. See him again, at the same command, stretching forth his hand to slay his beloved son—that son in whom he had received the promise that his seed should be multiplied as the stars of heaven—that son in whom he had been assured that all the nations of the earth should be blessed—that son who was dear to him as his own life. What could animate him with courage and resolution to offer up such a sacrifice? The spirit of truth has informed us, "He was strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Behold Daniel, the man highly beloved, entering the lions' den with firm step and unaltered countenance. His heart was fixed, trusting in the Lord; and when he was taken up out of the den no manner of hurt was found upon him. Why? because he believed in his God.

Behold Shradrach, Meshach, and Abednego walking in the midst of the burning

fiery furnace, undismayed, uninjured, undisturbed. "Not a hair of their head was singed, neither had the smell of fire passed on them." Whence was this? It was because they believed that "the God whom they served was able to deliver them, and he did deliver them."

Behold the Apostle Peter walking upon the sea, and beginning to sink in the waters because his faith failed him; behold him following the Saviour afar off, and trembling before the damsel that kept the door, and with faltering tongue three times denying his Master; behold this same apostle, when his faith was strengthened, standing before the rulers at Jerusalem, and boldly accusing them of having crucified and slain the Lord of glory. He now makes good his former profession, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death." He henceforth lived to the glory of his Divine Redeemer, and at last laid down his life to testify his love.

Would you see further fruits of faith, read the large catalogue, which the apostle has drawn up in his Epistle to the Hebrews, of ancient worthies "who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were

made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Nor are there wanting in modern days illustrious examples of the efficacy of a living faith to strengthen, comfort, and support, under the most trying circumstances. See the martyrs of our own church exulting in the midst of flames, and glorifying their Redeemer with their expiring breath. We behold here that confidence in God which enabled them to encounter the most appalling dangers, and overcome the most formidable enemies. What, therefore, can more nearly concern us than to obtain like precious faith, a faith which realizes the presence of God, a faith which unites us with the Saviour of the world, a faith which enriches us with the consolations of the Spirit, a faith which opens to us the bright prospects of a glorious immortality. As faith secures the richest blessings of time and of eternity, so unbelief forfeits all these blessings, and exposes us to "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish."

To disbelieve the promises of an earthly friend is regarded as peculiarly insulting. What tongue can express the guilt of disbelieving the God of truth, disregarding his promises, and despising his threatenings. Unbelief rejects the stupendous plan of redemption which was formed in the divine counsels before the worlds began; unbelief

slights the richest mercy and the tenderest love; unbelief counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and does despite to the Spirit of grace. What exhortation, therefore, can be more important than that exhortation of the Apostle to the Hebrews, "Take heed, brethren! lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

The petition in my text is suited to multitudes in the Christian world. How many approach the Saviour as the afflicted father did, with doubts of his ability or his willingness to receive them, conscious of their guilt, oppressed with the burden of their sins, earnestly desirous of relief, yet apprehensive of never obtaining it. The compassionate Saviour invites such to come to him, and be healed of all their infirmities. He offers a balm for every wound, but they have not courage to stretch forth the hand of faith and receive the precious gift. Like the disciples in the storm, they are full of fears and anxieties, and forget that Jesus is with them in the vessel, and that he has only to utter the command, "peace, be still, and suddenly there will be a great calm." Well may the Saviour address them as he did his trembling disciples, "Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?" Well may he say to them, "Have I not proved my love by descending

from the highest realms of light for you and for your salvation, by taking upon me the form of a servant, and shedding my heart's blood for your redemption? Have I not loved you with an everlasting love, and have I not power to save you to the uttermost? Neither men nor devils can pluck you out of my hand. Only believe, and all will be well, everlastingly well." Let every weak and trembling believer be encouraged to look continually to this compassionate Saviour, and to cry to him again and again, in the language of my text, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief."

III. *The success* which attended this prayer next calls for our consideration. No sooner had the afflicted father cried to Jesus for relief than his cry was heard. "Jesus rebuked the foul spirit, saying to him, thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him." Though the faith of the petitioner in my text was weak, yet he who never yet cast out any who came to him, who never yet broke the bruised reed, nor quenched the smoking flax, heard the prayer of the mourner, and granted his request. Have we not here abundant encouragement to come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help

in every time of need. Do we not here see the Saviour waiting to be gracious, hearkening to the cry of the distressed, wiping away the tears of the afflicted, and healing the broken-hearted?

May not parents in particular learn from this example to apply with confidence to the Saviour of sinners in behalf of their offspring, to entreat him to create clean hearts and to renew right spirits within them, to guide them by his counsel, and afterwards to receive them into glory. Such prayers, when offered up in faith, never fail of reaching the Throne of Grace, and bringing down rich blessings on children's children. What a lively comment does the history we have been considering afford on the gracious words of our Lord, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Prayer, my brethren! is the golden key which opens the gates of heaven, which unlocks the treasures of time and of eternity, and puts us in possession of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

Our all-prevailing Advocate has solemnly assured us that "whatsoever we shall ask the Father in his name, he will give it us." Frequent, fervent, and persevering prayer is one of the principal means of obtaining living faith. No human power, no human per-

suasion, can implant this divine principle in the heart. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is of the operation of God; it is imparted by the Father of lights, "from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." This precious gift is given to those who seek, and ask, and knock.

Attendance on the word preached is, moreover, a powerful instrument of obtaining saving faith. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The divine blessing accompanies the divine ordinance. It was while "the servants of the most high God" were proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, so that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul, and became a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus. And may I not appeal to the experience of many of my hearers whether they, too, have not often found the Lord opening their hearts and increasing their faith, whilst they have been listening to the words of eternal life?

All the appointed means of grace, when duly used, strengthen the faith of the believer. The devout reception of the Lord's Supper in an especial manner sets forth the Redeemer crucified before the eyes of his people, and often has he been known of them in breaking of bread. To find the Redeemer is to find mercy and pardon, grace and sal-

vation. All blessings are found in him. The treasures of his love are inexhaustible, the riches of his grace are unsearchable, and the wonders of his power are past finding out.

Come to this all-sufficient Saviour, my brethren! with a full persuasion of his readiness to receive you. Have you ever known, have you ever heard of any one of the human race being cast out who came to him? What evidence could you require which he has not already given of his willingness to save? See him restoring the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the halt, the withered, the maimed. Hearken to his compassionate voice, saying unto the leper, "I will, be thou clean, and immediately he was cleansed;" to the blind man, Receive thy sight, and immediately he received his sight; to the penitent who washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee;" and to the disciples who were overwhelmed with terror when they beheld him walking upon the sea, "It is I, be not afraid."

To every weak and trembling believer the kind and sympathising Saviour utters the same gracious declaration, "It is I, be not afraid." "It is I who suffered, bled, and died for thy redemption. It is I who rose from the grave for thy redemption. It is I who ascended into heaven for thy redemption.

It is I who have the keys of death and of hell, and who am now seated at the right-hand of the Majesty on high, and live for ever to make intercession for thee. Then be not afraid. Satan may assault thee, the world may allure thee, and thy own deceitful heart may be ready to betray thee; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. Fear thou not, therefore, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee; yea, uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Even when the hour of thy departure shall come, and when thy pulse shall beat slow, and thy tongue falter, and thine eye close in death, I will be with thee, my rod and my staff they shall comfort thee."

Here, my brethren! is a Friend who will never leave you, who will never forsake you: one who has all power given him in heaven and in earth. Never can ye be so fallen that he cannot raise you, never can ye be so polluted that he cannot cleanse you, never can ye be so weak that he cannot strengthen you, never can ye be so lost that he cannot save you. Then look continually to him. Place your whole dependence on his merits, and "be not faithless, but believing." Remember all that he has done and suffered for you. Read the wonders of his love in his pierced hands, and feet, and side, and resolve with

the great apostle of the Gentiles to glory in nothing save the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus will you be able to say, in the near views of eternity, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him unto that day." Thus will you find comfort in life, peace in death, and joy through all eternity.

SERMON IV.

MATT. XXVI. 42.

—Thy will be done.

SUCH was the prayer of the Saviour of the world when his "soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." The event which occasioned this prayer is the most awful and interesting that ever occurred since time began to roll. It involves the highest interests and the most important concerns; the glory of God and the eternal happiness of man. The period was fast approaching when the great work of redemption was to be accomplished, and the kingdom of heaven to be opened to all believers. The blessed Jesus, who had undertaken to perform what neither men nor angels could ever have performed, "to make atonement for sin and bring in everlasting righteousness," now saw the tremendous hour of suffering drawing nigh. He had retired

with three of his disciples into the garden of Gethsemane, and "began to be very heavy and sore amazed." The mysterious conflict with the powers of darkness commenced; the sins of the whole world were laid upon the Redeemer; the consolations of the Divine presence were withdrawn, and overwhelming sorrow compassed him around. He had a clear and distinct view of all things that were coming upon him, not only of his sufferings in general, but of every particular circumstance. He foresaw the treachery of Judas, the ingratitude of Peter, and the desertion of every friend. The scourge, the thorns, the nails, and the cross were before his eyes. Under this weight of inconceivable sorrows he had recourse to fervent and repeated prayer. Three times he earnestly besought his Heavenly Father, that "if it were possible the bitter cup might pass from him." He who was touched with a feeling of our infirmities, at first shrinks from the agonies of the cross, but he soon recalls the petition which the severity of his sufferings had extorted, and cries aloud, "O my Father! if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done."

In treating this interesting passage of Holy Scripture, I shall endeavour, in humble reliance on divine assistance, to shew,

I. The reasonableness of that entire resignation to the divine will of which our blessed Saviour has left us an example.

II. The happiness which attends such resignation; and,

III. I shall offer a word of exhortation and consolation to those who are "any ways afflicted in mind, body, or estate."

I. The proofs which God has given us of his tender love in our creation, preservation, and redemption, leave us no room to doubt that he careth for us, whilst every object around us declares his wisdom, his goodness, and his power. The heavens above, and the earth beneath, the myriads of creatures which his hand has formed, and which his providence sustains, our bodies which are so "fearfully and wonderfully made," and our souls which are endued with such vast capacities and such boundless desires, all speak the greatness and majesty of God. His knowledge is infinite; it extends to all times, all places, all circumstances. The past, the present, and the future are naked and open to his view. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth." The highest archangel who ministers before his throne, is no

less dependant on him for every moment of his existence than the worm which crawls upon the ground. His eye beholds at the same instant all the different orders of angels in heaven, all the various nations of men upon earth, every fowl that wings its flight through the air, every fish that moves in the waters of the great deep, every beast that traverses the remotest forest, and every insect that sports in the summer's breeze. The children of men are objects of his peculiar care. He was pleased to create them after his own image, and when by their disobedience they lost their original righteousness, forfeited his favour, and exposed themselves to endless misery, his mercy interposed for their relief. "He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life." What fuller assurance could earth or heaven afford than this gift of love, this pledge of mercy that God "would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth?" The apostle's reasoning on this subject is strong and convincing. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." What therefore can be more reasonable than to resign ourselves to the will of so kind, so merciful, and so tender a Father? No holier or wiser prayer was ever offered up

than the prayer "Thy will be done."—It includes all that is reasonable, just, and good. When we pray "Thy will be done," we pray for the happiness of the whole human race; for it is not the will of God "that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." We pray that we may not be left to ourselves, to the blindness of our own wishes, and the impetuosity of our own inclinations, but that all our affairs may be ordered by a wisdom which cannot err, and a goodness which never fails. We pray that we may be made meet for glory at present, and received into glory hereafter; for "this is the will of God, even our sanctification." Well, therefore, may every human being join with heart, and soul, and voice, in the important petition, "Thy will be done." The will to which we are required to be resigned is the will of one who knoweth what is good for us a thousand times better than we know ourselves;—of one who is intimately acquainted with every circumstance in our condition, with every fibre in our frame, with every desire of our hearts; who "understandeth our thoughts long before," and numbereth the hairs of our head. If God's dealings with us sometimes appear dark and perplexed, harsh and severe, this proceeds from our limited views, and imperfect apprehensions. We see only the things which are before us; we feel the chastise-

ment of the rod, we taste the bitterness of the cup; but we see not the blessed effects which our afflictions are designed to produce; we we see not the kind hand which administers the bitter potion; we know not the purposes of mercy which our sufferings are accomplishing. Like wayward children, we shrink from the correction which a tender parent inflicts; and wish to follow our own inclinations, though they are hurrying us along to the precipice of destruction. All opposition to the will of God arises from ignorance of our real interest. Could we but take a survey of the whole plan of our existence, and see how the sufferings of the present life are connected with our eternal condition, we would not, for the whole world, alter a single circumstance in the appointments of God; we would not wish to avoid one stroke of his rod, nor desire the slightest change in the ways of his providence. The minutest events of the present life extend their influence to eternity. They are links of a chain which reaches to the throne of God. They are parts of a scheme which comprehends countless ages, and involves immortal interests. The smallest alteration in any one of these events might be attended with awful and irretrievable consequences. God in great mercy retains the disposal of these events in his own hands, and "ordereth them after the counsel of his will."

"He appoints the bounds of our habitation," he determineth the circumstances of our birth, our family, our connections, our occupations, our talents, our trials, our temporal and our spiritual mercies. He often promotes our happiness by blasting our favourite schemes and disappointing our ardent wishes. He deprives us of our darling possessions, and levels the objects of our affection with the dust. "Behold, he taketh away, and who can hinder him?" These privations, however painful to flesh and blood, are mercies in disguise. "All these things are against me," said Jacob, when reflecting on the supposed loss of his children, but in reality they were most merciful dispensations, tending to his own future comfort, to the preservation of his family, and the accomplishment of many important designs of Providence. Those events of our lives which we regard as most painful, frequently become sources of strong consolation, when the events which we most passionately wished should come to pass, we not unfrequently perceive afterwards would have subverted our happiness, and injured our best interests. We flatter ourselves with high enjoyment from the accomplishment of some favourite plan. We picture to ourselves a thousand scenes of happiness, which we view as connected with some future change in our condition, but we afterwards perceive that all

this was the delusion of our own imagination, and see reason to bless the goodness of God in frustrating our wishes, and disappointing our hopes.

Our ignorance of what is good for us should teach us entire resignation to the will of God. To murmur against the dispensations of his providence is equally sinful and absurd. He has a right to do with us "as seemeth good unto him." "We are the clay, he is the potter." As we every moment depend on him for life, and breath, and all things, it is meet, right, and our bounden duty to submit ourselves wholly to his blessed will. In the chequered path of life we meet with various trials and numerous afflictions, but every one of them is ordered and arranged by our Heavenly Father. His kind hand mingles every ingredient in our cup. This consideration should teach us to say with our blessed Saviour, under the severest calamities, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Though nature may struggle, grace will submit. Behold Job, when bereaved of his dearest possessions, when visited with sorrow upon sorrow, and breach upon breach, no murmuring word escapes his lips, but with holy resignation he falls down upon the ground, and with humble adoration says, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be

the name of the Lord." Behold Eli, when informed of the awful judgments which God was about to bring upon his house; did he break out into murmurings against the severity of the decree? Far otherwise. He acknowledges the sovereignty of the Most High, and expresses his submission to the divine will in the strongest terms. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." Above all, behold the Redeemer of mankind, in his bitterest agony, exclaiming, "Thy will be done."

Such is the temper with which it becomes us to receive every affliction, whether of mind, body, or estate. In the darkest night of adversity, when the storm rages violently, and "deep crieth unto deep," a voice from the surrounding clouds seems to address the tossed and afflicted soul in such language as this, "Be still, and know that I am God," the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Judge of all the earth, the Sovereign Disposer of every event; it is I who formed thee in the womb, who preserved thee whilst yet hanging on thy mother's breasts; it is I who have sustained thee ever since thou wast born; it is I who have bought thee with a price, even with the precious blood of my only-begotten Son; and am I not able to do for thee exceeding abundantly above all that thou canst ask or think? Wilt thou not then

resign thyself to my unerring will?" What, therefore, can be more evident than the reasonableness of submitting to his will who hath such manifold claims to our submission? Well may we say with our blessed Saviour, under the severest trials and the acutest pains, "Thy will be done."

We proceed, II. To consider the blessedness which attends such resignation.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee," saith the prophet, "because he trusteth in thee."

Entire resignation to the Divine will brightens the darkest hours, assuages the bitterest sorrows, and softens the acutest pains. It gives comfort under all circumstances. Whatever may be the sufferings of the Christian, the reflection that they are appointed by infinite wisdom, and administered by unbounded goodness, reconciles him to them all, and more than reconciles him. Since it is the will of God (says he) that I should endure such a measure of affliction, I will cheerfully endure it. I would not wish it otherwise. I would not alter a circumstance of the trial. I would not abate a single pain. I would not escape one stroke of the rod, if it were in my power. An advanced Christian, when lying on his deathbed, being told that he had only a few hours to live, replied, "What pleaseth God

pleaseth me;" and a pious parent, who was bereaved of his only son, was overheard saying, "If I could recall him to life by raising a straw from the ground, I would not, since it is thy will, O God, to call him hence." The blessedness of being thus wholly resigned to the Divine will is indescribable. It makes the soul wise in the wisdom of God, strong in his strength, and happy in his happiness. When in the sincerity of our hearts we can say, under all circumstances, "Thy will be done," we have found out a remedy against every calamity. The destroying angel may pass through the land, the judgments of the Lord may be abroad in the earth, and every personal and domestic affliction invade our dwelling, but the assurance that none of these things come to pass without the permission of the tenderest of Fathers, who will sanctify them all to our spiritual and eternal good, is sufficient to hush every complaint, and reconcile us to every trial. Hear the triumphant language of the apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." While the impatient murmurers of the world can see nothing but thick darkness around them, the resigned Christian beholds

light arising in darkness, and enjoys inward peace, and secret joy, when all is noise and confusion without. The angel of the covenant is with him, and shews him the radiant bow in the cloud; discloses to his view the hand which guides the wheels of the universe, which measures the waters of the great deep, which hurls the thunderbolt and directs the storm. In this almighty hand he feels that he is safe. If called to walk through the fiery furnace, he knows that the Saviour will be with him, and not suffer a hair of his head to be singed. If exposed on the wide ocean to the roaring storm and yawning deep, he knows that there is one in the ship with him who has only to utter the words, "Peace, be still, and suddenly there will be a great calm." If he be labouring under a variety of bodily diseases, so that, like Job, there be no whole part in him, from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, still he holds fast his confidence, knowing that he who once "healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease amongst the people," can in a moment make him whole, and will restore him to perfect soundness when he seeth it good for him.

If bereaved by death of his dearest relatives, if his "lovers and friends be put far from him," yet he knoweth that his Redeemer liveth, and that his best Friend can never

die, and will never forsake him. This persuasion reconciles him to every bereavement. At the moment when his tears flow, and his heart throbs with grief, he utters the memorable prayer, "Thy will be done."

This holy resignation has the happiest influence on every event in human life: it infuses sweetness into the bitterest cup, it softens the severest calamities, and heals the deadliest wounds. The richest consolations are generally afforded in periods of deepest distress. God lifts up the light of his countenance upon the pious mourner, and speaks to him in such reviving words as these, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right-hand of my righteousness." When the compassionate Saviour manifests himself to the soul of the sufferer, he causes him to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." It is this which communicates real happiness.

> "Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor:
> And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

When we are wholly resigned to the will of God, all things come to pass as we would have them. Whether events be prosperous or afflictive, we would not desire that they should be otherwise than they are. It is sufficient for us to know that they are the

appointments of God, and must therefore be wise, and just, and good. This resignation to the Divine will converts our afflictions into mercies, and turns all our possessions into gold. He who under every change of circumstances can say, in the sincerity of his heart, "thy will be done," has found out the secret of happiness. No evil can happen unto him. He knows that it is good for him to be afflicted, and that afflictions never come but when the wisdom of God sees them necessary. He knows that when they do come they are sent in mercy, and are tokens of the care of his Heavenly Father, who careth for him. With such views of the nature and effects of sanctified affliction, I proceed,

III. To offer a word of exhortation and consolation to those who are any ways afflicted in mind, body, or estate.

There is perhaps not one person in this assembly, from the oldest to the youngest, who does not labour under some outward or inward affliction. A word of exhortation to the afflicted, therefore, must be seasonable to all, and a word of consolation cannot be unacceptable.

Whatever your afflictions be, my beloved brethren! remember that they "come forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." If for a

season ye be in heaviness through manifold temptations, it is because he seeth this discipline to be needful for you. In this way he is training you for more extensive usefulness upon earth, and for higher degrees of glory in heaven. Could you but see the end from the beginning, as God sees, you would yourselves choose the very path in which he is leading you. The cup which he has given you to drink is precisely what you would prepare for yourselves. It contains the very medicine which your case requires, the remedy without which you must surely die. God is too merciful to leave you to your own guidance, or to suffer your own will to be done. This would be to give you up to certain, speedy, and inevitable ruin. In very faithfulness he afflicts you. He places you in the furnace of affliction to purge away your dross, to brighten your graces, and sanctify you wholly in spirit, soul, and body. "My brethren!" saith St. James, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience." Instead of *fainting* under the burden which God has allotted you, and murmuring against his providence, learn to say with the prophet, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not;" and with the apostle, "We glory in tribula-

tions, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope."

The Gospel of Christ is full of consolation to "all who are any ways afflicted in mind, body, or estate." It reveals the Majesty of the universe as "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation," who is both able and willing "to comfort and succour all them who in this transitory life are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity." It reveals a Saviour of unbounded compassion, who shed his blood for your sake, and who ever liveth to make intercession for you. It moreover reveals a comforter of almighty power, and a heaven of everlasting joys. With such abundant sources of consolation provided for you, my beloved brethren! why should you be "full of heaviness," or why should your soul be "disquieted within you?" Whatever be the cause of your grief, "put your trust in God, and you shall yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance." He will give you patience under your sufferings, and a happy issue out of all your afflictions. Is "the remembrance of your sins grievous unto you, and the burden of them intolerable?" Look to the Saviour of the world, who is "the propitiation for your sins," rely on his merits, and trust in his promises; take his yoke upon you, which

is easy, and his burden, which is light, and ye shall find rest to your souls."

Are you bereaved of friends who were dear to you as your own life? Remember who it is that has removed them from your sight, even God, who can, by his presence, more than supply the loss which you have sustained. If the friends of whom you are bereaved died in the Lord, the lips of truth assure you that they are "blessed," blessed beyond all that you can yet conceive. They are, even now, "in joy and felicity" which no tongue can describe. Is this a change to be lamented? Would you recall them from the realms of glory to struggle again with the trials and sufferings of this painful state, again to endure the pangs of dissolution, and pass again through the valley of the shadow of death? "God forbid, you are ready to say, that we should indulge such a selfish and unfeeling wish." Then be resigned to his will who doeth all things well. "Turn to the stronghold as prisoners of hope." Look unto him who is the helper of the helpless, the friend of the friendless, "the father of the fatherless, and the husband of the widow," and you will find comfort which never fails, "peace which passeth all understanding."

Are you labouring under bodily pains and infirmities? Remember that "whom the Lord

loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Think of the pains and sufferings of him who was "wounded for your transgressions, and bruised for your iniquities." Direct your eyes to Mount Calvary, and while you behold your Saviour fainting, bleeding, dying for your sins, learn to imitate his patience, and to say with him, "Thy will be done."

Are you suffering from the unkindness and desertion of friends? Here again, look to your Saviour, who, in the extremity of his sufferings, was deserted by all. Look to that unchangeable Friend who will never leave you, who will never forsake you.

Are you afflicted with poverty? Remember him who had not where to lay his head. Consider how many of the best of men have suffered far more than you suffer. Think of the state of prophets, apostles, and martyrs, who were once "destitute, afflicted, tormented." Put your trust in God, and he will "supply all your wants according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." His storehouse is inexhaustible. His power and willingness to help are equal, for "he is everlasting strength and everlasting love."

Whatever be your condition, my brethren! be resigned to the will of God, and be assured that on the whole it is best for you. "Cleave

unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." Walk closely and humbly with him, and "your light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

SERMON V.

GEN. XXII. 10.

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

THE scene which is here presented to our view is awfully interesting. It represents a parent in the act of preparing to take away the life of his beloved child. From such a spectacle we would shrink with horror, if the same page which records the transaction, had not informed us of the authority which required it, and of the important ends which it was designed to answer. Never was there a more perfect example exhibited by a mere man, of ready obedience to the commands of God, of unshaken confidence in his promises, and entire resignation to his will, than that which the history of Abraham affords. That part of it which I have selected for the subject of our present meditations is peculiarly instructive and deeply affecting. May the divine

blessing be amongst us whilst I endeavour to shew,

I. The nature and circumstances of the event recorded in my text.
II. The reasonableness and wisdom of Abraham's conduct; and,
III. Our obligations to follow the bright example of faith and obedience which he has left us.

I. God was pleased repeatedly to try the faith of this renowned patriarch; first, when he called him from his country and his father's house, to sojourn in a strange land, and afterwards on numerous other occasions; but the severest trial which Abraham ever experienced, is contained in the history which now demands our attention. "God said unto him, Abraham, and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Here all opportunity for expostulation is cut off; for what could the patriarch urge but that his nature revolted against the command, and his heart shrunk from the deed, that Isaac was his son, his only son, whom he tenderly loved, and therefore he could not offer him up as a

burnt-offering without doing violence to the feelings of a parent, and without being overwhelmed with unspeakable agony: but all these pleas are anticipated, and no room left for debate.

God commands, and he must be obeyed. Abraham had been so much accustomed to communion with God, by visible appearances and personal conferences, that he could not be mistaken in this case, but must have had infallible assurance that the command was from heaven. It was surely the most trying command which was ever given to any of the children of men. The fond parent is required to sacrifice his beloved son, the comfort of his life, the staff of his age, the very son in whom God had promised that "all the nations of the earth should be blessed," the very son in whom the Lord had promised that his seed should be increased and multiplied as the stars of heaven. He is not only required to deliver up this darling child as a sacrifice, but he is enjoined to perform the awful deed with his own hand. What could be more severe, what more piercing, what more contrary to flesh and blood? The feelings of humanity, the yearnings of affection, the bowels of the parent, all revolt against the act. But mark the strength of Abraham's faith, and his unshaken confidence in the goodness of God.

He is deaf to all the remonstrances of nature, he hushes the pleadings of parental love, he stifles the agonizing emotions of his heart, and attends solely to the peremptory command which he had received. He did not defer his obedience from day to day; he did not hesitate what course he should pursue; he did not consult with flesh and blood, or put off the severe trial to a distant period, but applied himself without delay to obey the voice of the Lord, for so the sacred history informs us. "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for a burnt-offering, and rose up, and went into the place of which God had told him." Three days was he performing the journey. That his obedience might want no circumstance to heighten it, and that his faith might appear in all respects triumphantly victorious, God appointed this space between the command and the performance of it. He gives him full time for reflection and deliberation—he gives ample scope for his reason to canvass and debate the matter, and opportunity for natural affection to exert all its influence. Nor were these days to be spent in retirement, meditation, and prayer, to fortify and animate his resolution, but altogether in the company of that son whom

he was about to slay. What tongue can declare the severe conflict, the lively emotions, the overwhelming yearnings of heart which this tender parent must have felt during those three days journey? Often as he cast a look towards his beloved son, often as he heard the sound of his voice, often as he received any token of affection from him, how must his heart have bled with the reflection, that he was within a few hours to take the "knife and slay his son."

They were now drawing near to the appointed spot. "On the third day Abraham lift up his eyes, and saw the place afar off: and Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass, while I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it upon Isaac his son, and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and they went both of them together." Every circumstance now contributed to heighten the severity of the trial. No human friend stood by the patriarch to strengthen his resolution! no animating voice was heard to encourage his obedience! but he had continually before his eyes the object which of all others was most calculated to shake his resolution and undermine his faith. How must his heart have been rent between his duty to God and his affec-

tion to his child. The respectful attentions, the fond endearments, the affectionate conversations of this son whom he so tenderly loved, must have heightened the interesting scene beyond all expression, and have excited the liveliest emotions which ever agitated the human mind.

The conversation which took place at this awful moment was calculated to pierce the very heart of the patriarch, and to shake him to the centre. "Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, my father, and he said, Here am I, my son; and he said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Was ever question more piercing than this, Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? Had not the heart of the patriarch been strongly guarded by the shield of faith, had not the secret hand of the Almighty sustained him, this affecting question must have overcome his resolution, and have constrained him to relinquish his design. But the command of God was still sounding in his ears, and he was determined to obey. He returns for an answer, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering. So they went both of them together." At length they arrive at the awful spot. All things are now ready—the altar, the wood, and the fire. The sacrifice is prepared. Isaac is bound and laid

upon the altar. "And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." Thus did faith triumph over affection, and grace over nature.

II. The reasonableness of Abraham's conduct on this trying occasion calls next for our consideration.

To hearken to the voice of the Lord, and to obey his commands under all circumstances, in all conditions, and on all occasions, is the highest wisdom of man. Our finite understandings may not in every instance be able fully to comprehend the reasons of the Divine commands, but it is sufficient for us to know that what God wills is ever just and good, and that "the Judge of all the earth must do right." What can be more reasonable than cheerfully to follow where God leads the way? The path may be dark and perplexed, rugged and forbidding, but it is the path which leadeth to "glory and honour and immortality." Whilst we are engaged in obeying the commands and doing the will of God, we are wise in his wisdom, and strong in his strength. No command could have been of a more extraordinary kind, or liable to more formidable objections than the command which Abraham received to sacrifice his son. Yet these objections had no weight with Abraham when set in opposition to the express and positive command of God. He

knew that he who gave life has an unquestionable right to take it away at what time and in what manner he thinks fit. He was fully persuaded the same Almighty hand which formed each member when as yet there was none of them, could with ease restore the lifeless corpse when cold and insensible as the clod of the valley to more than its former vigour and animation. He knew that "all things are possible to God," and that the power which had miraculously blessed him with a son could as miraculously recover his child from the grasp of death. Of this he was fully persuaded, but whether it would please "the Father of mercies" thus to interpose, or whatever the issue might be, he plainly saw the path of duty marked out before him, and he resolved to pursue that path wherever it might lead him. With the Divine command for his warrant and God for his guide, he was as certain as he was of his existence that eventually all would be well. He knew that infallible truth could not deceive him, that infinite wisdom could not mislead him, that irresistible power could not fail him, and that unbounded mercy would not disappoint him.

At the moment when Abraham took the knife to slay his son "his heart was fixed, trusting in the Lord." Hosts of angels surrounded him, and with eager attention watched

the issue of so extraordinary a transaction. The faith of the patriarch was tried to the uttermost. He knew not in what manner his deliverance would be accomplished, but he was fully persuaded that the God of his life would not forsake him in the hour of his distress, nor was he disappointed, my brethren. At the moment when his hand was stretched out to shed the blood of his darling son, "the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

What language can describe the emotions of gratitude and joy which must have possessed the patriarch's heart on hearing this voice from heaven. With what tender affection did he embrace his beloved child, and how heartily did they congratulate each other on this revival as it were from the dead. The pangs of anticipated separation were more than recompensed by this happy reunion, and by the assurance of being instrumental in conveying blessings to the remotest generations, and to all the nations of the earth. "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and

hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." Such was the high benediction pronounced on Abraham by an angel from heaven, "because he obeyed the voice of the Lord."

The important ends which this trial of the patriarch's faith was designed to answer fully justify the severity of the trial. Besides the animating example which it affords to the latest period of time, it moreover exhibits a lively and expressive type of the death and sufferings of the Redeemer of the world. In both cases we see a kind and tender Father giving up his only son to death. The duration of the action was the same as that between Christ's death and resurrection, both of which were designed to be represented by Abraham's offering up his son. As Isaac carried the wood on which he was to be bound and offered up as a sacrifice, so our blessed Saviour carried the cross on which he afterwards suffered. As Isaac was bound so was our Redeemer. The lamb which Abraham said God would provide naturally directs our view to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the

sins of the world." The very mountain on which Abraham offered up his son we have reason to believe was the mountain on which the Saviour of mankind afterwards suffered, bled, and died. It appears to have been on this occasion that the desire of Abraham to see the day of the son of man was gratified. "Your father Abraham (says our blessed Saviour) desired to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad." He saw in Isaac bound and laid upon the wood a lively representation of the Redeemer of the world set forth crucified before him. The reasonableness and wisdom, therefore, of Abraham's conduct on this trying occasion are sufficiently evident.

Suffer me now to bespeak your serious attention whilst I proceed to shew,

III. Our obligations to follow the bright example of faith and obedience which he hath left us.

"Whatever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Amidst the "cloud of witnesses" with which "we are compassed about," the patriarch Abraham shines with transcendent lustre. So ready was his obedience, so victorious his faith, so entire his resignation, that he was honoured with the highest title ever conferred on any of the offspring of Adam, even that of "The friend of God."

His faith and his obedience are equally conspicuous. His faith was a living, active, powerful principle, influencing his whole life and conversation, and constraining him to act on all occasions "as seeing him who is invisible. Abraham believed God (saith the apostle) and it was counted unto him for righteousness." He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but gave glory to God; being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able to perform. "By faith Abraham went out not not knowing whither he went, and sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Abraham when he was tried offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promise offered up his only begotten son, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Both duty and interest persuade us to follow this noble example of "faith working by love." The day whch Abraham saw afar off shines upon us in its meridian splendour, the day-spring from on high hath visited us, "the sun of righteousness hath arisen with healing in his wings." Together with the example of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, we have the example of him who "spake as never man spake," who taught as never man taught, who lived

as never man lived; him who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. We have his life to guide us, his precepts to direct us, his spirit to sanctify us, his angels to guard us, and his merits to plead for us. We have all the aids and encouragements which we could reasonably desire in running the race set before us.

The faith of Abraham is set forth as a pattern for our imitation. "Seest thou (saith St. James) how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect." Abraham's faith produced those fruits of holiness which true faith never fails of producing; it purified his heart, it overcame the world, it wrought by love. This living faith is one of those "good and perfect gifts which came down from the Father of lights," it is of the operation of God, and must be sought for by frequent, earnest, and persevering prayer. It is the spring of all acceptable obedience. It justifies, it purifies, it sanctifies. It is moreover the source of all consolation. There are no circumstances however distressing, no calamities however dreadful, no trials however severe, under which a lively faith in the mercies of God and the merits of a Redeemer will not animate, comfort, and support the soul of man. Though the foundation of the earth should be shaken, though the mountains should be carried into the midst of the sea, though the

stars should fall from heaven, and the vast fabric of the world be dissolved; though all the principalities and powers of darkness should combine against the believer, the shield of faith would protect him, the Lord of hosts would be with him, and the God of Jacob be his refuge. It is no ordinary support which the Christian enjoys: an almighty power is engaged on his side. When he is called to extraordinary trials, extraordinary aids are afforded him. "As his day is, so shall his strength be." However destitute his condition may appear to a blind and unbelieving world, he has inward consolations which they know not of.

> "He sees a hand they cannot see,
> He hears a voice they cannot hear."

With the eye of faith he looks steadfastly towards heaven beyond the skies, and beholds "Jesus standing at the right hand of God." With such comforts and supports, my brethren! if we be followers of "faithful Abraham," we need not fear the severest trials which may be appointed us in the way of our duty. "Trials must and will befall." Nearly does it concern us to be prepared to meet them with that christian fortitude and holy resignation which marked the conduct of "faithful Abraham." Though we are not called to so severe a trial of our faith as he

was, yet we are called "to do the will of our Father which is in heaven;" with the same readiness of mind we are required to pay the same unreserved obedience to the Divine commands, and place the same unshaken confidence in the Divine promises.

If our lives be prolonged to an advanced period we must expect to suffer the heart-rending pang of separation from our dearest relatives, to convey to their long home the remains of those whom we loved as our own souls, to weep over the graves of revered parents, to close the eyes of darling children, and bedew with our tears the corpse of many a beloved friend. Whoever has experienced trials of this nature has known something of Abraham's feelings when he "took the knife to slay his son." The laceration of those ties which bind heart to heart inflicts a wound which no hand can heal but the hand of God. All other afflictions are light compared with this: yet even under these heart-piercing bereavements the reflection that it is the will of God silences every complaint. The Christian mourns, but does not repine at the righteous dispensations of his God, who, even in anger, remembereth mercy, and mingleth sweet consolations with the bitter cup. In the hour of deep distress, when the desire of our eyes is removed from our sight, and every object around us bears inscribed on

it, "lamentation, and mourning, and woe," in that awful hour of bereavement, the angel of consolation cheers the drooping spirit of the Christian, and enables him not only to be "patient in tribulation," but to exclaim with holy Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

The goodness of God often converts the bitterest afflictions into the choicest mercies. He sets bounds to the sea of affliction, and appoints where the waves thereof shall be stayed. He prescribes how much pain and sorrow shall be our lot, both as to measure and duration, and never suffers us "to be tempted above what we are able to bear." In the extremity of our sufferings he commands us to look unto him and be saved. Here the weary traveller finds a shelter from the storm, and a sanctuary "in every time of trouble." Does not the voice of duty and of interest admonish us to place our whole trust in God, and after the example of "the father of the faithful," to yield a ready obedience to all his commands? With this example of faith and holiness, it concerns us often to compare our hearts and lives. What evidences have we to satisfy us that we "believe to the saving of our souls?" What fruits of holiness does our faith produce? What sacrifices do we make at the calls of duty?

What self-denial do we practise? What resemblance do we bear to faithful Abraham? These are enquiries of high importance.

Should we be required to part with our dearest possessions, should the destroying angel be commissioned to visit us with "breach upon breach," should all that we most value upon earth be laid in the dust, and every temporal calamity rush upon us like a flood, still the language of resignation becometh us—"It is the Lord, let him do as seemeth good unto him. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Such, my brethren! is the conduct which wisdom prescribes. We are at present in the infancy of our being. We know not what is good for us. The possession of those objects which we most ardently desire would often prove our ruin. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." He is rash and precipitate; ready to quaff poison out of a golden cup, and to pursue with ardour the phantom that lures him to irretrievable destruction.

What an unspeakable mercy is it, my brethren, that the all-wise God doth not leave his weak and wandering creatures to themselves, but guideth them by his counsel, directeth their paths, chasteneth them in mercy, and by the dispensations of his providence and the operations of his grace fitteth them for the enjoyment of endless glory.

To his all-seeing eye the past, the present, and the future are open and naked. He knows what will be for our good myriads of ages to come. He sees that the cross from which we shrink is essentially necessary to prepare us for the crown which we desire.

To this Father of mercies, to this God of all consolation, be persuaded, my beloved brethren, to devote yourselves wholly and entirely. "Commit your way unto the Lord, and put your trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass." Make him your refuge, your defence, your "strong hold, whereunto you may always resort." View his hand in every event of your lives. Mark his wisdom and goodness in every dispensation of his providence. In the deepest afflictions and calamities hearken to the voice which calls to you from the surrounding clouds, "Be still, and know that I am God." In the most pressing exigencies, and under the severest losses, be assured that "God will provide." Walk, therefore, in the steps of "faithful Abraham." "Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." At his command be ready to relinquish whatever is nearest and dearest to you upon earth, your health, your reputation, your substance, your children, your friends, and life itself. Remember that "you are not your own, but are bought with a price, therefore glorify

God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are his, and so pass through things temporal, that finally ye lose not the things eternal." The same grace which shone so brightly in the patriarch Abraham is offered to you, my brethren. The same strength which was made perfect in his weakness shall also be made perfect in yours. "Be strong, therefore, in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life." This one thing do, "Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto the things which are before, press continually towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

SERMON VI.

MICAH II. 10.

—This is not your rest, because it is polluted.

THE desire of rest is deeply implanted in the human heart. It is this desire which gives rise to all the labours under the sun. Persons of every age, of every sex, of every condition, are engaged in the pursuit of rest, and yet experience clearly shews that the generality are far from obtaining the object of their pursuit. The anxious cares, the incessant toils, the repeated disappointments of the children of this world, manifest that they are walking in a vain shadow, and disquieting themselves in vain. How can it be otherwise whilst they seek for rest on a troubled sea, and for quietness in the midst of storms and tempests. The testimony of all past generations confirms the declaration in my text—This is not your rest.

May the Divine blessing accompany us whilst we proceed to consider :—

I. Why this is not our rest?
II. Where is our rest? and
III. How that rest is to be obtained?

I. Our merciful Creator evidently designed us for the enjoyment of rest. He who is over all God blessed for ever, could have had no other end in view in our creation than the manifestation of his own glory in the diffusion of that blessedness which he himself possessed before the worlds began. Accordingly we find that man, as he came forth from the hands of his Creator, was enriched with all that could contribute to his happiness; created after the divine image, made but a little lower than the angels, and placed in a garden of delight, where the Lord God had made every tree to grow which is pleasant to the sight, and good for food. The world was then indeed a place of rest; every object was beauty to the eye, and every sound was music to the ear. God dwelt with man, and man walked with God; but no sooner did sin enter into the world than an awful change took place; the wretched transgressors no longer enjoyed sweet communion with their God; they fled from his presence, they were driven out of Paradise, the thunders rolled, the lightnings flashed, the earth brought

forth thorns and thistles, toil and pain prevailed, and sickness and death succeeded. Our first parents communicated their corrupt nature to their wretched offspring, and left them in a world of sin and misery, and exposed to that just sentence pronounced by an offended God, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." It is evident that such a world cannot be our rest, because it is polluted: it is polluted with sin. Wherever we cast our eyes we see abundant evidence of this humiliating truth. "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty." In the regions where idolatry prevails the ground is stained with the blood of human victims, and the air filled with the shrieks of murdered infants; but these fearful scenes, you will say, are far distant from christian lands. True, my brethren, but may we not trace the marks of pollution in every land? Where can we direct our view without beholding iniquity abounding? Where is the country in which the Majesty of the universe is not insulted by oaths and imprecations, by the profanation of his day, his word, and ordinances? Where is the country which is not polluted by rioting and drunkenness, by chambering and wantonness, and by the

thousand abominations which shun the light? This, therefore, cannot be our rest, because it is polluted.

II. The present state is moreover not our rest, because it is subject to perpetual changes —changes in our condition, from riches to poverty, from honour to disgrace, from health to sickness, from life to death. The highest of the sons of men have not unfrequently been suddenly reduced to the lowest and most destitute condition. Behold Job, the greatest of all the men of the east, surrounded with abundance of all that the world could give, in a few hours stript of all his possessions; his servants slain with the sword, his cattle carried away by the Chaldeans, and his children buried in the ruins of the house where they had been feasting and making merry. Behold Nebuchadnezzar seated on the throne of mighty Babylon, issuing his decrees to all nations, and people, and languages, saying in his heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; again, behold him hurled from his throne, and grazing with the beasts of the forest. Behold Haman, advanced above all the princes of the empire, going forth to the palace joyful, and with a glad heart; behold him again, hastening to his house mourning, and with his head covered: and next behold him hanging on the gallows which he had

prepared for Mordecai the Jew. These sudden and awful changes are not confined to the rich and great. They are incident to all sorts and conditions of men. The peasant as well as the prince is subject to continual changes in mind, body, and estate. Men of the most powerful understandings have, in a moment of time, had the lamp of reason put out in obscure darkness. Men who prided themselves on their strength of body, have suddenly been stretched on the bed of languishing, their strength gone, and themselves dying and wasting away. Human life is like the grass of the field, which in the morning is green, and groweth up, but in the evening is cut down, dried up, and withered. How many have retired to their beds in the full enjoyment of health, their breasts full of milk, and their bones moistened with marrow, and yet before the dawning of the day the pains of death have compassed them around, and they have been separated for ever from the world. Numerous examples of this nature have been every where witnessed of late, when that fatal malady* prevailed amongst us which hurried multitudes into the eternal world suddenly and unexpectedly. Do not such providences sound in our ears, as with a voice of thunder, "This is not your

* The Cholera.

rest?" Are we not often reminded of this truth by the changes which take place in the members of our own families? To-day we behold the blooming countenance of a darling child with delight, and flatter ourselves that this object of our affections will be the staff of our declining years: to-morrow we behold the same countenance pale and ghastly—the fair flower has faded—the blight of death is upon it. Who amongst us has not had reason again and again to adopt the mournful language of the Psalmist, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness?"

We see, therefore, my brethren, why this is not our rest.

II. We come next to enquire, Where is our rest?

Our rest is in heaven, where the Lord hath prepared for them that love him, such things as eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.

1. There we shall rest from sin. The corruptions of our nature shall annoy us no more, the allurements of the world shall tempt us no more, the assaults of satan shall disturb us no more. Our warfare will be accomplished, our race run, our trials ended, and the prize obtained.

2. We shall rest from all our doubts and

fears. We shall no longer be cast down with painful apprehensions that the Lord hath forgotten us, and that the Lord hath forsaken us, but we shall then see that he hath graven his people on the palms of his hands, and that they are dear to him as the apple of his eye. Our souls shall be no longer disquieted by the weakness of our faith, the wavering of our hope, or the faintness of our love, but our faith shall be swallowed up in sight, and our hope in enjoyment. We shall then indeed love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and our love shall be lasting as eternity itself.

3. We shall moreover rest from all grief and trouble occasioned by those around us. The cry of distress shall no more sound in our ears; the tears of the widow, and the wailings of the orphan, shall no more disturb our repose, but all tears shall be wiped away from all faces; no jarring note shall be heard through the boundless realms, but every heart and every tongue shall unite in songs of praise and acclamations of joy.

4. We shall moreover rest from all toil and labour. We shall no longer eat bread in the sweat of our brow, but shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of our Father, shall eat of the fruit of the tree of life, and drink of the

waters of life, which flow for evermore, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the abode of everlasting rest we shall be like the angels in heaven: our spirits shall be made perfect, our faculties strengthened, and our capacities enlarged. Our bodies too shall undergo a wonderful change. In the morning of the resurrection they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father; they shall be fashioned like unto the glorious body of our Divine Redeemer: this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.

The place where the rest which remaineth for the people of God is to be enjoyed, is enriched with all that can communicate perfect bliss. The gates of the city are of pearl, and the foundations of the walls are garnished with all manner of precious stones. The streets are of pure gold, and "the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." How blest must be that abode where the Majesty of the universe continually pours forth the splendours of his glory; where the Redeemer of the world sits enthroned in the highest state of exaltation; where the Spirit of all grace sheds joy, and peace, and love, in every direction; where

angels and archangels sound their golden harps for evermore; where patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, and all the glorious company of heaven, unite in ascribing blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever." There we shall meet our pious friends who have gone before us, and enjoy their society through the countless ages of eternity; there we shall form one happy family, all united in the golden bands of holy fellowship, know even as we are known, and love even as we are loved. An inexhaustible flood of joy will flow from heart to heart, and from breast to breast. The song of praise shall never cease, the crown of glory shall never fade. The happiness of the blessed in heaven, unlike the pleasures of the world, which are ever changing and passing away like a dream, is unchangeable as its Author, and lasting as eternity. We see, therefore, where our rest is, even in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.

III. With what earnestness should we enquire, How this rest may be obtained? Certain it is, that it can never be obtained by any strength of our own. We are sinful, fallen, helpless creatures, and, if left to ourselves, could never have broken the chain of

our sins, could never have conquered the powerful enemies we have to encounter, could never have laid hold on eternal life; but, blessed be God! he hath not left us to ourselves. He hath sent his only begotten Son from the highest heavens to seek and to save that which was lost, to obtain for us eternal redemption, and purchase for us everlasting rest. This compassionate Redeemer invites all who labour and are heavy laden to come unto him, and promises that they shall find rest to their souls. Till the sinner accepts the invitation and cleaves to this precious Saviour by a true and living faith, he is spending his money for that which is not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not. He is seeking the living amongst the dead; he is feeding upon husks, and hurrying on in the broad way which leadeth to destruction. There is but one path which leadeth unto rest, and that path is clearly marked out in the Gospel. All who would walk in it are required to exercise "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ:" they are required to embrace the Saviour in all his offices, and to become new creatures in Christ Jesus. The rest which remaineth for the people of God is not to be obtained by faint wishes or feeble desires, but must be earnestly sought and vigorously pursued.

The Saviour himself commands us to "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and tells us that many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. The apostle Paul exhorts us to labour to enter into the rest which is provided for us, and to fear lest a promise being left us of entering in, any of us should seem to come short of it. Though all our striving and labour will be in vain, unless the Holy Spirit work in us both to will and to do, yet we are required, in dependance on the aids of that blessed Spirit, to "give diligence to make our calling and election sure, and to press continually towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The prize well deserves all our exertions—it is an everlasting prize. But how dull and heartless are we in the pursuit of it; how ready are we to loiter by the way, and to be diverted by the shadows which surround us from seeking the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. What can be more unreasonable than such conduct as this? Does not the mariner keep the destined port in view during the whole of his voyage? Does not the sick man seek the recovery of his health by the diligent use of the remedies prescribed for him? Does not the prisoner long to be released from his captivity, and the condemned criminal employ all means to obtain

his pardon? and shall we, my brethren, who are traversing the ocean of life, forget the end of our voyage? Shall we, who are sick even unto death, neglect the remedy which is offered us? Shall we, who are condemned by the holy law of God, refuse the pardon which is purchased for us? We profess to regard heaven as our home, and acknowledge that we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, but how few live as strangers and pilgrims upon earth, seeking the things which are above, walking by faith, and not by sight, and esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of the world. Yet such is the character of the true Christian. He lives upon earth as a citizen of heaven; he weeps as though he wept not; he rejoices as though he rejoiced not; he buys as though he possessed not; he looks for a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He finds even now a measure of that "rest which remaineth for the people of God." Every hour brings him nearer and nearer to that rest. He is daily ripening for glory, and no sooner is he absent from the body, than he is present with the Lord.

Who amongst us would not wish that this should be his own lot? and why, my brethren, should it not be the lot of every individual here present? Is not the Saviour ready to re-

ceive all who apply to him? Is not his voice heard in these our solemn assemblies from sabbath to sabbath, crying aloud, "Look unto me, and be saved. Come unto me, and I will give you rest." But these gracious calls will not last for ever. The messenger of death is on the wing, the day of salvation is drawing to a close. Behold, the Judge standeth before the door. Under the impression of these awful solemnities, suffer me to address a word of exhortation to those of my hearers who are not yet convinced of the truth in my text, "This is not your rest;" and next, those who are seeking the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

What arguments will convince you of the insufficiency of the world to afford rest, if the express declarations of the word of God, and your own experience concurring with those declarations, fail to convince you? Do ye not hear the Spirit of truth declare again and again that the world and the things that are therein are vanity and vexation of spirit, that a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, that they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition, "and that our life is but a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away?" Does not all that you see, all that

you hear, and all that you feel, confirm these important truths? The possession of the whole world could never satisfy your boundless desires. Those who possess most of this world's goods are often more miserable than the poorest of the sons of men.

See Ahab, king of Samaria, in full possession of all the riches and honours of the kingdom, coming into his house heavy and displeased, lying down upon his bed, turning away his face, and refusing to eat bread, because Naboth the Jezreelite would not give him the inheritance of his fathers. What beggar in his realm more wretched than he? but we need not go back to former ages for proofs of the emptiness of the world.

I appeal to your own hearts whether you have not found it to be a vain, an empty, an unsatisfying world. How often has the idol of your affections been dashed to pieces before your eyes. How often have the objects which you earnestly desired to obtain proved sources of misery when obtained. How often have the deaths of friends, and relatives and acquaintances sounded in your ears, "This is not your rest." And will you yet cleave unto the dust? Will you yet prefer the clods of the earth to the living God; the vanities of time to the glories of eternity; the fleeting pleasures of a deceitful world to the solid, substantial, everlasting joys of heaven? Oh! be

not such enemies to yourselves, to your own interest, to your own peace, to your own happiness, but now, whilst the light of the everlasting gospel is shining around you, now whilst the Saviour of sinners is inviting you, now whilst the Spirit of grace is urging you, now whilst the Father of mercies is entreating you, "seek the rest which remaineth for the people of God." To-day, whilst it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, lest the Lord of hosts should swear in his wrath that ye shall never enter into his rest. To-day, while it is called to-day, seek the pardon of your sins, the renewal of your nature, and the salvation of your souls, through that all-sufficient Saviour who ever liveth to make intercession for you.

To you, my beloved brethren, who are labouring to enter into the rest which remaineth for the people of God, I would say, seek a more abundant measure of divine grace, that ye may endure unto the end, steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in love. Look continually to that precious Saviour who is the way, the truth, and the life. Whatever your trials and afflictions may be, know that they are working out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, know that you are every hour drawing nearer to your rest. Run, therefore, with patience the race set before you, and ever keep

in view the glorious prize, the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give you in that day. And now, my beloved brethren, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified, and may you be preserved holy and blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

SERMON VII.

EXOD. XX. 24.

In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

THIS passage of holy scripture calls for peculiar attention. It discloses the Lord of heaven and earth to our view, not in the awful manner in which he appeared to the Israelites on Mount Sinai, with thunders and lightnings, and the voice of a trumpet sounding louder and louder, but with the mild radiance of mercy, and with the tender voice of love, as he appeared to his servant Moses, when he made all his goodness to pass before him. "The High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," assures us that he will dwell with the children of men, that he will come unto them and bless them. "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

May he now come unto us and bless us, whilst we proceed to consider,

I. The promise which the text contains; and,

II. The duties which it inculcates.

I. Amongst the exceeding great and precious promises with which the Scriptures abound, there is not one more important, more extensive, or more worthy of all acceptation, than the promise in my text.

1. It is unspeakably *important*. It assures us of the gracious presence of the highest and best of Beings in these our solemn assemblies. He who fills the heaven and heaven of heavens with his glory, he who speaketh and it is done, he who commandeth and all things are obedient unto him, has promised to come unto us, and bless us. This promise includes all that the heart of man can desire, all things necessary to life and godliness, all that is truly good for us. It includes the blessings of the heavens above, and of the earth beneath; the riches of divine grace, and the treasures of divine love; the unspeakable gift of a Saviour, with all the benefits which he hath purchased for us by his life, death, resurrection, and ascension; the pardon of our sins, the renewal of our nature, the consolations of the Holy Spirit, and a title to everlasting life and

glory. In possessing God we possess all things. "All things," saith the apostle, speaking to true believers, "are your's; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

2. Mark, my brethren, *the extensiveness* of the promise. "In *all* places where I record my name," in every part of the world, from the rising up of the sun unto the going down thereof, from the islands of the sea to the remotest regions of the earth, wherever a house of prayer is erected to my name, and dedicated to my glory, there will I vouchsafe my presence and command my blessing. The promise is not confined to the temple at Jerusalem, nor to the worshippers there, but extends to all places where the Lord records his name, and to all his true worshippers, "of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue." Nor is the promise made to the assembly in general, but to every individual worshipper in particular; "I will come unto *thee*, and I will bless *thee*:" however mean and obscure thy condition may be, however unknown and unnoticed, however despised and disregarded by men, "I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

3. Is not the promise therefore *worthy of all acceptation?* It concerns persons of every

age, and of every condition. The old and the young, the rich and the poor, who "worship God in spirit and in truth," have all an equal interest in this precious promise. It is made to all who call upon the name of the Lord, yea, all such as call upon him faithfully. "The promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," "In all places where I record my name will I come unto thee." *The name of the Lord* includes all his glorious perfections, his wisdom and power, his goodness and mercy. When Moses earnestly prayed that he might see the glory of God, the Lord made all his goodness to pass before him, and proclaimed his name, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." The name of the Lord is written on every page of the creation. We may read it in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars. "The heavens declare his glory, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work." The stormy winds sound forth his name, and the thunder echoes it from shore to shore. The various tribes of men, wheresoever dispersed over the face of the whole earth, the cattle that graze upon a thousand hills, the beasts of the forest, and the fowls of the air, all proclaim the name of him who "openeth

his hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness." But it is not to these manifestations of himself that the Lord Jehovah refers in my text. It is to the spiritual manifestation of himself to the hearts of believers. It is to the riches of divine grace, as displayed in the stupendous work of redemption; it is to the wonders of the cross, the consolations of the Spirit, and the hopes full of immortality, that he refers. The name of Jehovah is recorded wherever Christ crucified is preached, wherever the glad tidings of salvation are proclaimed, and prayer and praise are offered up through the all-prevailing Intercessor. There the Lord records his name as the one true and living God. There he makes known his glorious perfections. "There," says he, "will I come unto thee." There will I make my presence known unto thee. There will I shew thee my glory. There will I constrain thee to exclain, "The Lord is in this place: this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

If it be enquired how the Lord comes unto his people, and blesses them in the house of prayer? I answer, He comes unto them by his Holy Spirit, and blesses them.

1. By hearing their prayers. When they spread forth their hands in his house, he hears "from heaven, his dwelling place,"

the supplications which they make before him. He pardons their sins. He pours out his Holy Spirit upon them, and gives them "all things which are requisite and necessary both for their souls and bodies." His eyes are open night and day towards the place where he records his name, and his ears are attentive to the prayers of his faithful worshippers. When "with penitent hearts and lively faith we make our humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon our knees;" when we acknowledge that "we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and that there is no health in us," he pities, he pardons, he forgives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ever liveth to make intercession for us. When we come into his courts with praise, and render hearty thanks unto his name for the great benefits which we have received at his hands, he is well-pleased with our thanksgivings, and accepts our sacrifice of praise through his beloved Son.

2. The Lord, moreover, blesses his true worshippers in his house of prayer by nourishing them with his word and ordinances. "He makes them to lie down in green pastures, and leadeth them beside the still waters." He applies his word to their hearts

and consciences, that word which "is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." He openeth their understanding that they may understand the Scriptures, and become wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. He guides them to the cross of the Saviour, and there displays the riches of his grace, and the wonders of his love. He meets them at his sacred table, and makes himself known to them in breaking of bread; and finally, he dismisses them with his blessing, with that "peace which passeth all understanding."

3. The Lord, moreover, blesses his servants by coming unto them, and making them joyful in his house of prayer. We receive the visits of earthly friends with peculiar pleasure. We anticipate their coming with feelings of delight—we welcome their arrival with acclamations of joy. St. Paul speaks of some who had received him as if he had been an angel from heaven, and who were ready to have plucked out their eyes to have given him; then with what unspeakable joy should we receive the visits of our Heavenly Father, who "is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think;" and who comes to us, not as a way-

faring man who tarries for a night, but as a friend who will abide with us for ever. Such are the blessings which the promise in my text contains.

II. We come next to consider *the duties* which it inculcates.

1. It teaches us the importance of frequenting the house of prayer. In the earliest ages of the world we find the faithful servants of God worshipping before the presence of the Lord in some consecrated spot. We find the patriarchs building altars unto the Lord wherever they sojourned. No sooner did the waters of the flood subside, and Noah go forth from the ark, than he builded an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. We find "The father of the faithful" also worshipping the Most High in a consecrated place, and there calling on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. When we trace the footsteps of the patriarch Jacob through his various journeyings, we see him erecting an altar wherever he pitched his tent. In the wilderness the tabernacle was erected in which the Lord of Hosts dwelt between the cherubim, and manifested forth his glory. At length the magnificent temple was erected at Jerusalem, "whither the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." When he who was the desire of

all nations came to his temple, he filled it with his glory. In the infancy of the christian church we find the little company of believers assembling in "an upper room," and there enjoying sweet communion with their Saviour and their God. In the days of persecution, when fire and sword pursued the Christians in all directions, they were accustomed to meet at the midnight hour in caves and dens of the earth, to offer up their prayers and supplications, their praises and thanksgivings, to the God of their salvation. When the period arrived that whole nations were converted unto the faith, and kings became nursing-fathers, and queens nursing-mothers unto the church, houses of prayer were every where erected, where thousands and tens of thousands of the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ worshipped the Father in spirit and in truth. The blessed Jesus himself, while he sojourned on earth, left us an example of frequenting the house of prayer. We find him again and again in the temple and in the synagogue, and we read that this was his uniform practice on the Sabbath-day. Of his apostles we read that they "were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." And what, my brethren, has been the practice of true believers in all ages of the church? Have they not delighted in frequenting the house of prayer? Have they

not exclaimed with the pious Psalmist, "A day in thy house is better than a thousand. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts; my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house. They will still be praising thee."

It is a high privilege to be permitted to assemble within the courts of the Lord's house—to be permitted to come into the immediate presence of the Sovereign of the universe, and draw near to his throne with full assurance of acceptance through his beloved Son. In the experience of the saints of old we may mark with what pleasure they looked back on the days spent in the courts of the Lord, and with what delight they looked forward to the return of those days. "When shall I come and appear before God (says the Psalmist). One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple." Nearly does it concern us all to possess this oneness of purpose, this devotedness to the service of God, this attachment to his house, and this delight in his ordinances.

It is truly gratifying to see so many houses of prayer rising in different parts of our be-

loved country, and inviting all of every age, and of every condition, to assemble within their walls from sabbath to sabbath. Here they will have an opportunity of joining in that "form of sound words" which includes all the wants and desires of the whole human race. Here they will have an opportunity of hearing the Holy Scriptures read and preached. Here they will offer up prayers in which so many of the noble army of martyrs once united, and which some of them sealed with their blood. The devotions in which those faithful followers of the Lamb are now engaged in the church triumphant above, are scarcely more heavenly than the holy and solemn accents in which they once worshipped in the church militant here on earth, whilst with hearts overflowing with love and gratitude, they exclaimed, "We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting. To thee all angels cry aloud: the heavens, and all the powers therein. To thee cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory." Expect great things, my Christian brethren, when you assemble within the house of prayer with penitent and believing hearts. The Lord himself hath promised to meet you here,

and to bless you—to bless you in your persons and in your families, in your basket and in your store; to bless you with all temporal and spiritual blessings, and to supply all your wants, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus. As the beams of yonder sun now shed their cheering influence around these sacred walls, so will the Sun of Righteousness here rise on all the true worshippers of the living God "with healing in his wings." Come, therefore, within the courts of his house with enlarged expectations, with prepared hearts, and holy desires, and doubt not but you will find the promise in my text abundantly accomplished. I remember being much struck with the remark of a pious poor woman, who said, in reference to her attendance in the house of prayer, "I am never suffered to go empty away when I come with my pitcher to these wells of salvation." Neither will any of you, my beloved brethren, be suffered to go empty away, if you come to the wells of salvation thirsting for the waters of life, looking to that precious Saviour who has promised to give you living water.

What is the house of prayer? Is it not the place where we come to meet our best and kindest Friend, that friend who "has loved us with an everlasting love," that friend who shed his heart's blood for our redemption.

The house of prayer is opened to us as a sanctuary from our cares, and as a refuge from our sorrows, as a house of mercy where we may receive pardon and reconciliation, grace and salvation. Here the pious poor after the toils of the week may enjoy sweet refreshment, and learn how they may find rest to their souls, how they may become rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath prepared for them that love him. Here the heart-broken penitent may meet that compassionate Saviour who came to bind up the broken-hearted and to comfort all that mourn. Here the aged may meet with him who has promised to carry them even to hoar hairs, and to be with them when their strength faileth them: and here the young may find "a guide of their youth, and a stronghold whereunto they may always resort." Here they may find that tender Shepherd who gathereth the lambs with his arm, and carrieth them in his bosom.

Let all therefore be persuaded to come within the courts of the Lord's house with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, and to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."

2. The promise in my text further enforces the duty of exhorting others to attend the house of prayer. The promise is made to parents and to children, to masters and servants, to old and young, and to "all that are afar off,

even as many as the Lord our God shall call." It is of the same extent with that gracious invitation of our Lord, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." The highest service which we can render our fellow-creatures is to pomote their spiritual and everlasting welfare; and how can we more effectually accomplish this important end than by bringing them within the sound of the gospel, by bringing them to the cross of the Saviour, and pointing out to them "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world?"

Parents are under peculiar obligations to guide the footsteps of their children to the house of prayer, and to teach them betimes "to call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable." There are few more lovely spectacles than that of a pious family, assembled on the Lord's-day in the Lord's house in decent apparel, all uniting in singing the praises of the Most High, and calling upon him as their Father which is in heaven. If every family belonging to this congregation presented such a spectacle, our house of prayer would then indeed "be like a little heaven below."

And why, my beloved brethren, should not this be the case? What should prevent parents and children, masters and servants

from thronging the courts of the Lord as regularly as the sabbath returns. Has the Father of mercies promised to meet you here, and to bless you abundantly, and will ye despise the blessing? "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." Who amongst you can tell how much he may lose by absenting even one sabbath from the house of prayer, by neglecting even one opportunity of hearing the word of salvation? Let not this be the case with any of you, my beloved brethren. Now that the good providence of God has furnished you with such a beautiful and commodious place of worship,* see that you avail yourselves of the privilege, and say one to another, "Come ye, let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his way, and we will walk in his paths." "Consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." The day is indeed fast approaching when we must all render a solemn account of the use we make of every sabbath, of every call to repentance, and of every opportunity of salvation.

*Preached at the Consecration of a Church in the Isle of Man.

To how many of our dear friends and relatives has that day already arrived. How many of them are removed from our sight, and their place knoweth them no more. Soon shall we too follow in our turn. Soon shall "our dust return to the earth as it was, and our spirits return unto God who gave them." Nearly does it concern us therefore, whilst we have the means of grace and the opportunities of salvation yet afforded us, to make a diligent use of them, that we may hereafter meet our pious departed friends in the temple above, and there join with them in ascribing "blessing and honour, and glory and power unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.

3. From the words of my text we may learn, moreover, to enter the house of prayer with awe and reverence. Were we to appear before an earthly sovereign, how careful should we be in preparing for the interview, and how watchful over our whole deportment when admitted into the royal presence. Then how much more careful should we be in our preparations, how much more watchful over the temper of our minds, and the words of our mouths, when we approach the Sovereign of the universe, who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins. How solemn the reflection that we are here assembled in the presence of him who is

from everlasting to everlasting, of him who created heaven, and the things that are therein, and the earth, and the things that are therein, and the sea, and the things which are therein." Of him "who doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of the earth." Never can we approach this great and awful Being with too deep a sense of our own vileness and unworthiness, or too lively apprehensions of his boundless majesty and glory. "Behold, now (says Abraham), I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord which am but dust and ashes." Thus too should we approach the Majesty of the universe with reverence and godly fear, and yet with filial love, and well grounded confidence. We should come before him sprinkled with the blood of our divine Redeemer, and clothed with the robe of his righteousness, and when thus arrayed we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

4. From the words of my text we may further learn the duty of practising the lessons which we are taught in the house of the Lord.

The great design of all the prayers in which we join, of all the ordinances of which we partake, and of all the instructions which we receive in these our solemn assemblies,

is to renew us after the divine image in righteousness and true holiness. The Lord has promised to bless us in a particular manner in his house of prayer, by "turning away every one of us from his iniquities." Who is it that he will bring to his holy mountain, and make joyful in his house of prayer? They that join themselves to the Lord to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of his covenant.

The prayers of our beloved church have all a practical tendency. Whilst they teach us how to pray they teach us also how to live. They teach us to seek for true repentance and God's Holy Spirit, that we may live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. They teach us to shew forth the praises of our heavenly Father not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life, so that at the last, we may come to his eternal joy through Jesus Christ our Lord.

"Holiness becometh the house of the Lord for ever, and holiness becometh the members of a church which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. "Be ye doers of the word," saith the apostle James, "and not hearers only, deceiving

your own selves." There is indeed no more fatal self-deception than to rest in the mere attendance on the ordinances of religion without seeking that entire change of heart and life, that sanctification of spirit, soul and body which they are designed to produce. These ordinances, when duly improved, effectually promote personal piety, brotherly love, and universal holiness. They make us meet for glory, and conduct us to glory. Not, my brethren, that they can in themselves produce such effects, but they produce them as instruments in the hands of that blessed Spirit who worketh all in all. In the right use of them the Lord hath promised to meet us and to bless us.

Trust therefore to his promise, my beloved brethren. As often as ye assemble within these sacred walls, remember who it is that is amongst you at that hour, even the Lord of hosts, the King of glory. Reverence his sanctuary, and delight in his service. Let every sabbath find you and your households assembled before him. Come with minds duly prepared. Pray that the Lord would give you "hearing ears, and understanding hearts, that ye may receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." Pray for the bishop and pastors of Christ's flock, that their lives may exemplify and adorn the heavenly doctrines which they

preach, and forget not to pray for your own minister, that both by his life and doctrine he may set forth God's true and lively word, and rightly and duly administer his holy sacraments, that when all worshipping assemblies on earth shall be broken up, both you and he may be found on the right hand of the Judge, and obtain mercy in that awful day: and now "Blessed be the Lord God, and blessed be his glorious name for ever and ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen.

SERMON VIII.

JEREMIAH III. 22.

Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.

When the Majesty of the universe speaks, let all the earth keep silence before him. Let every ear be attentive, and every heart be open to receive the solemn accents. Such is the Speaker whom the prophet here introduces, and such the silent and deep attention his words demand. They are addressed to a particular class of sinners, but a class so numerous as to form a part of every worshipping assembly throughout the world. May the Holy Spirit, who alone can give the increase, be amongst us while we consider,

I. The persons addressed.
II. The invitation and the promise given them.
III. The effect of this invitation and promise.

I. Backsliders are the persons to whom the Lord here condescends to address himself; those who have once known the way of righteousness, but have turned from the holy commandment delivered unto them; those who have left their first love, forgotten their baptismal vows, and fallen from the privileges and consolations they once enjoyed; those who made an open profession of religion, and for a time ran well, but have gone back to the world, and to sin. The degrees of backsliding are various. Some fall away from the Saviour altogether, so as to walk no more with him: others partially, so as to bring dishonour on his cause, and a reproach on his name. There is a secret, and an open backsliding. Multitudes retain the form of godliness, when they have lost its power. They continue to frequent the assemblies of God's people, and to wear the garb of religion, while their hearts and minds are engrossed by the world, and the things of the world. They have the lamp of profession in their hands, but have no oil in their vessels. Such was the case of the church of Sardis; they had a name to live whilst they were dead. They had secretly and inwardly fallen from grace, whilst they still professed themselves followers of the Lord Jesus. Open backsliding prevails when vital religion becomes extinct in the soul, and those who once

" tasted the good word of God," and felt "the powers of the world to come," turn back to the pomps and vanities which they had renounced, and become again enslaved to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. These declensions, whether secret or open, are for the most part gradual. They generally begin in the closet. Secret duties are at first coldly and reluctantly performed, occasionally omitted, then more frequently, and at last given up altogether. Family duties too are discharged with less and less frequency and with less and less fervour and devotion. The fire on the domestic altar burns feebler and feebler, till at length it burns no more. Love to the Saviour declines, hatred of sin decreases, attachment to the world revives, former evil habits recover their strength, graces languish, and corruptions prevail. Backsliders begin, moreover, to disrelish the devotions of the sanctuary; they no longer call the " sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable." The house of prayer is seldomer and seldomer attended, and religious exercises of every kind become a burden and a labour. Christians begin to *decline* from the hour they cease to *advance* in the divine life. They are engaged in a race, and must never think of standing still. Their path must be as " the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect

day." Christians are, moreover, in a backsliding state, when their apprehension of divine things declines; when they neither see so clearly, nor feel so powerfully, the great truths of the Gospel as they once did, when eternal things are less valued, and earthly things rise in their estimation, when the sins which they had mortified again beset them and bring them into captivity. These are symptoms of a declining state which cannot be mistaken. The causes of backsliding are numerous. Amongst the principal are the love of the world, the fear of offending worldly friends, indulgence in intemperate habits, and neglecting the means of grace. Multitudes, like Demas, turn back from following the Saviour, having loved this present world. Multitudes are deterred from pursuing the narrow way which leadeth unto life, from the dread of incurring the ridicule of their former companions, and being exposed to the contempt of a blind and prejudiced world, and still greater numbers are led away from the right path by intemperance. They first quaff the intoxicating cup with fear and caution, they gradually increase the draught, they go on from one degree of indulgence to another, till at last they run to the excess of riot, while conscience, religion, health, and reputation are swallowed up in the gulph of sensuality.

The neglect of the means of grace is the

certain forerunner of backsliding. When prayer is omitted, when the table of the Lord is deserted, when the holy Scriptures are neglected, and the house of God is forsaken, the spiritual health of professors rapidly declines, and they hurry on in the downward path which leadeth to destruction. Nothing can be more awful than the state of all who thus fall away from their Saviour and their God. Every prayer in which they have joined, every sermon which they have heard, every warning which they have received, and every communion which they have attended, will aggravate their guilt and heighten their condemnation. Backsliders are represented in Scripture as forsaking their own mercies, doing despite to the Spirit of grace, and drawing back unto perdition. Their latter end is worse than their beginning, for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it to turn away from the holy commandment delivered unto them. Fearful, however, as their case is, and tremendous as is the precipice over which they are hanging, still their state is not hopeless. The Father of mercies, who would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, loudly calls upon them to turn and live, as will clearly appear when we consider,

II. The invitation and the promise given

them. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." How wonderful is the mercy of our God! instead of commanding those who have so grievously offended him to depart from him, he invites them to return—to return to the fold which they have forsaken—to return to the Father whose love they have despised—to the Saviour whose salvation they have neglected—to return to the Spirit of grace whom they have grieved. His invitation is, return to the service which ye once found to be perfect freedom. Return to the ways of religion, which ye know by experience to be ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. Return to the blessed hope which you once possessed, and to the bright prospects which you once enjoyed. The Father of mercies condescends to reason with them; "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "O, my people what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me?" "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel, a land of darkness?" "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Though backsliding children have nothing to plead in their defence, but are com-

pelled to lay their mouth in the dust, and to confess with the penitent Psalmist, "I have sinned against the Lord;" great and aggravated as their sins are, committed against light, and knowledge, and conviction, still they are invited to return. However weary and heavy laden they may be, however tempted and distressed, the compassionate Saviour is ready to succour them. He goes forth to seek them; his language is, Return. He cries to them by his prophets, and apostles, Return. He calls to them by his promises and threatenings, Return. He urges them by the voice of their consciences, and by the still small voice of the Spirit of grace to return. He seems to say, Where is such an one, and such an one, and such an one, who used to watch for the tokens of my approach, and come at the sound of my voice? are they carried away by their spiritual enemy, and led captive by him at his will? Behold, I come to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Are they bowed down with a load of guilt, so that they are afraid to approach me? Behold, I who am touched with a feeling of their infirmities invite them to return, and am ready to receive them graciously, and love them freely. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In such gracious words the kind and tender Shepherd

addresses those who have erred and strayed from his ways like lost sheep. He not only invites them to return, but he goes forth to seek them; he goes after that which was lost till he finds it. Were it not so, his strayed sheep would never more return; they would wander farther and farther, till they became a prey to the roaring lion, that goeth about seeking whom he may devour. The blessed Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, not only while he sojourned upon earth, but he still carries on the same gracious work. At this very hour he seeks every backslider amongst us by his word, by his providence, and by his spirit. His language to all such is, "Return, ye backsliding children." Nothing can be more gracious than the promise, "I will heal your backslidings, I will bind up your wounds, I will pour balm into them, I will restore your spiritual health, and cause the bones that are broken to rejoice." Our Lord, in one of his parables, represents himself as the good Shepherd, who, when he hath found the lost sheep, layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing, and beareth it home in safety. What a beautiful representation is here given of the care and tenderness of our divine Redeemer towards his people; he misses them when lost, he seeks them when they have strayed, he finds them in their wanderings, he gathers them with his arm, he carries them

in his bosom, and conducts them safely to his Father's house. The Holy Spirit persuades backsliders to return by every argument which can convince their understandings, and by every motive which can influence their hearts. He shews them what an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord. He opens to their view the fearful end of all who forget God, and persuades them, by the most gracious promises, and by the most alarming threatenings, to return. He beseeches them by the dying sorrows, and by the flowing blood of their Redeemer, to return; and to encourage them to return, he assures them that the Lord will have compassion on them, that he will subdue their iniquities, and cast all their sins into the depth of the sea. The Father of mercies himself sounds this gracious invitation in their ears again and again, Return unto me, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.

III. We come lastly to consider the effect of this invitation and promise; "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God." The hearts of the backsliding children are softened, they are overwhelmed with a sense of the unbounded goodness of their heavenly Father, and his love constrains them to cast themselves at his feet, and return to him without delay. They acknowledge him to be their Lord and their God, their Creator

and Preserver, their rightful owner, and their sovereign Ruler. They renew their covenant with him, and resolve henceforth to live wholly and entirely unto him. Such was the effect produced on the persons addressed in my text. The invitation met with a ready compliance. "We come unto thee."—And such is ever the effect when the word is brought home by the Holy Spirit with power to the heart. The backslider is awakened as from a deep sleep; his eyes are opened to see that he has been hurrying on in the path of the destroyer; that he has been grievously sinning against his Saviour and his God, against the most solemn vows and the most sacred covenant; that he has been bringing an evil report on the ways of religion; and that he has been a traitor to the cause of his Redeemer. He feels himself to be guilty and miserable; all his comfort and hopes are gone. The sorrows of the penitent, when he first turns to the Lord, are not to be compared with those of the backslider in heart, when he comes to be filled with his own ways. Would you see a proof of this, my brethren, turn your eyes to the sweet singer of Israel after his fall. There was a time when he might justly have been reckoned the happiest of men. His harp was continually tuned to songs of joy. His life was crowned with loving-kindness and tender mercies, his cup

ran over; but how mournful the change which took place in his state when he departed from the living God. His songs were turned into lamentation, and mourning, and woe; his house became a scene of desolation; sorrows encompassed him on every side; he watered his couch with his tears, and his sins were a sore burden, too heavy for him to bear. No wonder that the language of such an one should be, "create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit." How encouraging to all who thus desire to turn again to the Lord, to hear his voice calling unto them, "Return ye backsliding children and I will heal your backslidings." When they hearken to this invitation, and no longer keep at a distance from their God,—when they return to him with their whole hearts, and surrender themselves to his service, he receives them freely, and their sins and iniquities he remembers no more. Such is the effect which the invitation and promise in my text are designed to produce. Far from affording encouragement to continue in sin, they offer the most powerful argument to every backslider to escape for his life, and leave him utterly without excuse if he persist in treasuring up for himself wrath against the day of wrath. The Lord now solemnly declares, that

he is ready to heal the backslidings of all who return to him to-day, while it is called to-day; but no invitation is given, and no promise made, to those who delay. The command is "Return," return now from your evil ways; "cast away all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit." Nothing effectual is done till the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord. Babylon must be left, a sinful world must be forsaken, a corrupt nature must be renewed, before we can regard ourselves as walking in the path of life, or number ourselves amongst the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Whilst we cherish any secret sins, or habitually omit any known duty, it is a certain evidence of our being in a declining state. Many however are in such a state, without being conscious of it. Their declension has been so gradual that they perceive it not. But others perceive it. Why is their conduct so different from what it once was? Why is their place in the house of God so often empty? Why is their Bible so seldom in their hands? Why is their closet so seldom frequented? Their remissness in the discharge of religious duties, and their disrelish for all spiritual exercises, are evident proofs that they are departing from their God.

Suffer me to address a word of exhortation

to those amongst you, if any such there be, who are in this declining state. It concerns you, above all things, to consider what an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord your God. In forsaking him, you forsake the fountain of all joy, and the giver of all good. You are casting away the pearl of great price. You are bartering a crown of glory that fadeth not away for a fleeting shadow, a thing of nought. You are forsaking the path which leadeth to glory, and honour, and immortality, for the broad way which leadeth to destruction. I appeal to your own hearts, whether you find a greater measure of enjoyment in the service of Satan than you have found in the service of the living God: whether you find the ways of sin pleasanter than the ways of holiness: whether the haunts of debauchery and the assemblies of the wicked afford you more solid peace and comfort than the house of prayer, and the assemblies of God's people once afforded you. Does not your own experience testify the hollowness and deceitfulness of sinful pleasures? Though you may for a season drown the voice of conscience in a hurry of business, or a round of amusements, the hour is fast approaching when it will speak as with a voice of thunder, and set before you all the horrors of your state. We have many striking examples of this. A minister was once called on to visit a

backslider who had been confined two months to his bed, when he heard from his lips this awful confession; "The two months which I have been confined to my bed, appear to me like two millions of years. I would give thousands of worlds, if I had them, to be delivered from my present misery." Think, then, my brethren, what it must be to pass endless ages in such misery, and be persuaded to break off your sins by repentance, and to return to the Lord without delay. His spirit still strives with you. He waits to be gracious. Take courage, therefore, and set out afresh. Begin, as you began at first, by humbling yourself to the dust, and calling upon the Lord in the language of the prophet, "Turn me, and so shall I be turned," heal me, and so shall I be healed; save me, and so shall I be saved. Once you could say, the Sovereign of the universe is my friend: but now you have made him your enemy. Others are happy in his love: but you have lost that happiness. You once hoped to live with him in endless glory: but where is that hope now? It is gone, and you tremble at the dark prospect which lies before you. Why will any one amongst us continue in such a state a single hour, whilst the gracious invitation and the precious promise in my text, are sounding in his ears? Your God and Saviour now invites you to return. Return, therefore, in-

stantly, without delay, fully, without reserve, perseveringly, without end. Have recourse to immmediate prayer, and to the blood of the Redeemer which cleanseth from all sin. "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die." Seek, earnestly seek the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit. Come nearer and nearer to the compassionate Saviour, and henceforth cleave to him with full purpose of heart. Delay not in this most important of all concerns. Think of your dying hour, which may overtake you before yonder sun declines: and picture to yourselves the solemnities of that awful hour, your heart and your flesh failing you, your friends weeping around your bed, and the eternal world opening to your view. Think of the joys of heaven, and the torments of hell; and in the sincerity of your hearts, say with the backsliding children in my text, "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God."

I would moreover address a word of exhortation to those of my hearers who are going on their way rejoicing. Be thankful to the God of all mercy, who hath made you to differ: and take heed that you "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption." It is your duty, your privilege, your happiness to go forward, pressing continually "towards

the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Exercise your graces more diligently, and guard against the beginning of evil. Like the Apostle Paul, be willing to "suffer the loss of all things that you may win Christ, and be found in him." Like Peter, rejoice in being accounted worthy to suffer for the sake of your Redeemer: and and like Moses, "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures" of the world. You are now fighting for eternity, and running that you may obtain an everlasting crown. "To him that overcometh," saith the Saviour of the world, "will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne." Continue, therefore, to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life. Run with patience the race set before you. "Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." "Beware lest ye fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

"Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

SERMON IX.

ROM. I. 16.

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

SUCH is the declaration of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. He well knew the value of the Gospel. He felt its power, he experienced its blessings, he enjoyed its consolations. From the hour of his conversion he considered himself as set for the defence of the Gospel. He had already proclaimed the glad tidings of salvation in different parts of the world, and he now declares himself ready to preach the Gospel to them that were at Rome also. "For (says he) I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

May the Holy Spirit accompany us with his blessing, while we proceed to consider the three particulars contained in my text.

I. The declaration of the apostle, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

II. The reasonableness of this declaration; for it is the power of God unto salvation.

III. The persons to whom it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.

I. What are we to understand by the Gospel? The Gospel signifies good news, glad tidings, glad tidings of great joy. These glad tidings include salvation to a lost and ruined world. When "all had sinned, and come short of the glory of God"—when the sword of divine justice was unsheathed, and there appeared to be no way of escape, the boundless mercy of Jehovah found out a ransom for sinners, and laid help on one that is mighty. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Gospel displays the perfections of God in the clearest manner. His wisdom, his power, and his mercy are inscribed on every page of the everlasting record. In the stupendous plan of redemption "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ in all its splendour. The Gospel has revealed all

that it concerns us to know of the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity. It manifests the riches of his grace, and the wonders of his love. It shews us how "he can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus"—how he can magnify the law, and yet pardon the transgressor—how he can proclaim his righteous judgment before the assembled world, and yet open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. The Gospel is styled the Gospel of Christ, because Christ is the principal subject of the Gospel. The birth, the life, the death, the resurrection and ascension of Christ form the sum and substance of the Gospel. The doctrines of the Gospel are derived from Christ, the promises of the Gospel centre in Christ, and the blessings of the Gospel are obtained through Christ. With great reason, therefore, doth the apostle style it the Gospel of Christ. But why should he say that he was not ashamed of the Gospel? Is there any thing to cause shame in the revelation which has come down from the Father of lights? No, my brethren; yet the Gospel of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. The doctrine of a crucified Saviour ill suited the expectations of the carnal Jews, who looked for a mighty conqueror in their Messiah, one who would subdue their enemies and render them renowned amongst all the nations of

the earth. When instead of this mighty conqueror a Messiah was offered them who died as a malefactor on Mount Calvary, they rejected him with disdain, and would not have such an one to reign over them. The Greeks, too, who prided themselves on their learning, and were puffed up with their vain philosophy, spurned at the simple doctrine of the cross; and when the apostle preached to them Jesus and the resurrection, enquired, "What will this babbler say?" The followers of the Saviour moreover, were found for the most part amongst the lowest and most despised of the children of men, and were accounted as the offscouring of all things. Well, therefore, might the apostle be tempted to be ashamed of belonging to such a society, of belonging to a Master who was crucified, and to a sect which was every where spoken against. He was particularly exposed to this temptation, at a time when he was preparing to appear in imperial Rome, the centre of the whole civilized world, where philosophers taught and heroes triumphed, where arts and sciences flourished, and where all that is most prized and admired amongst the children of this world was found in rich abundance. Yet to the inhabitants of this great city he saith, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." When the apostle says I am not ashamed, he means much more than he expresses. Far

from being ashamed of the Gospel he regarded it as his glory, his joy, his hope, his all. "God forbid (says he) that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The apostle solemnly declares that he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. He was not ashamed to embrace the Gospel as his only ground of hope. Though it stripped him of all that he formerly gloried in, of all his boasted righteousness, of all his Jewish prejudices, and of all his self-exalting views, though it led him to see himself poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked, a vile, a lost, and miserable sinner, yet he was not ashamed to embrace this very Gospel as his choicest treasure. Nor was he ashamed to proclaim it to others, however it might expose him to scorn and derision, to persecution and death. There were many circumstances, my brethren, which might have made the apostle ashamed to publish the Gospel to the world. He who had been so bitter a persecutor of the followers of Jesus might well feel reluctance to stand forward to preach that Gospel which he had formerly laboured to destroy. He could not but anticipate the objection, is Saul of Tarsus, the cruel persecutor, become a minister of Christ? It can never be. Still

he was not deterred by this consideration, nor by the frowns of a persecuting world, nor by the loss of all that was most dear to him upon earth from proclaiming salvation through a crucified Saviour. He willingly suffered cruel mockings and scourges, yea, moreover, bonds and imprisonment, for the sake of the Gospel, and at last sealed his testimony with his blood. Well, therefore, might he say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

II. We come now to consider, why the apostle was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, "for it is the power of God unto salvation." It is the powerful instrument which God employs for the salvation of sinners, and it is suited in every respect for the accomplishment of this important design.

1. It clearly reveals the way of salvation. It points out the Lord Jesus Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life, as the only Mediator between God and man, as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, as both willing and able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. The plan of salvation, was formed in the divine counsels before the worlds began. It was foretold by prophets, it was proclaimed by angels, it was attested by miracles, it was sealed by the blood of the noble army of martyrs, and acknowledged by the holy church throughout

all the world. It clearly and distinctly reveals all things necessary to life and godliness. To every awakened sinner who makes the enquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" it replies, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Believe on him as thy prophet to instruct thee, as thy Priest to atone for thy sins, and as thy King to rule in thy heart and govern thy life. Whilst it reveals a Saviour who has made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, it moreover reveals a sanctifier to renew us after the divine image in righteousness and true holiness, a spirit of grace to conduct us through all the snares and temptations, the trials and afflictions of this mortal life, to the everlasting kingdom which God hath prepared for them that love him, and thus is it the power of God unto salvation.

2. The Gospel is, moreover, the power of God unto salvation as it is suited to persons of every age, of every condition. It is the guide of the young, and the staff of the aged. The salvation which it proclaims is equally suited to the highest and to the lowest of the sons of men. As all are sinners, so all stand in need of a Saviour, and what a perfect Saviour does the Gospel reveal. One who was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the open-

ing of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and to comfort all that mourn. This precious Saviour is peculiarly the friend of the poor and destitute, the friend of those whom all other friends forsake. His Gospel is the great charter of salvation. It embraces the eternal destinies of the whole human race, and will afford a theme of praise and adoration to myriads of ransomed sinners through the countless ages of eternity. The Gospel has made abundant provision for all the wants of man. It contains a balm for every wound. The angel who flies in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, conveys a message of peace and salvation to people of every colour, and clime, and condition, to the inhabitants of the continent, and the inhabitants of the isles, to the sick and dying, to the beggar, the convict, and the slave. To all these, the Gospel offers free, plenteous, and complete redemption. The voice of the Saviour crieth, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

3. The Gospel is further, the power of God unto salvation, as it renews and regene-

rates the soul of man. The history of the world from the day in which our first parents were driven out of Paradise, to the present hour, testifies the universal corruption of the human race. This corruption meets us every moment in a thousand shapes. The infant of days betrays it, nor is there an individual upon earth who has escaped its taint. We want, therefore, not only the pardon of our sins, but the renewal of our nature, and here the Gospel comes to our relief. It assures us that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, and that the influences of the Holy Spirit sanctifies every believer.

The Gospel is the revelation of the arm of the Lord, of his almighty power in enlightening the darkest minds, in softening the hardest hearts, and healing the deadliest wounds. The Gospel came from God, and returns to God. The doctrine of remission of sins, though the Redeemer, forms the grand peculiarity of the Gospel, and in an especial manner renders it the "power of God unto salvation."

The word salvation, my brethren, is become so familiar to the ears of men, that the full import of it is seldom considered. There is scarcely, however, a term of higher importance. It includes deliverance from sin, from Satan, and from hell; reconciliation to an offended God, restoration to the

divine image, and the possession of endless joy, and everlasting glory. The eternal salvation of one immortal soul is of higher moment than the temporal salvation of a whole kingdom. How unspeakably important, therefore, is the eternal salvation of myriads of immortal souls redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, and ransomed out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue. To accomplish this salvation, each person in the holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity has borne a part; prophecies have been delivered, miracles have been wrought, angels have ministered, and the Son of God hath suffered, bled, and died. The power which renders the Gospel effectual to the salvation of sinners is not from the preachers of the Gospel. They are merely instruments in the hands of God. "Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers, by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" The Gospel is not the power of men, nor of angels, nor of archangels, but the power of God. Thousands and tens of thousands, in every period of the christian church, have testified from their own experience that it is, indeed, "the power of God unto salvation." Mark the wonderful change which it produced in the hearts and lives of the first Christians. Behold multitudes who were dead in tres-

passes and sins now alive unto God, hating what they formerly loved, shunning what they formerly pursued, and wholly transformed by the renewing of their minds, devoting themselves, their substance, their time, their all, to the God of their salvation, "as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things."

Behold the martyr suffering at the stake, triumphing in the midst of the flames, exulting in his sufferings, rejoicing in the glorious prospect set before him, and commending his spirit into the hands of his Saviour, with hopes full of immortality. What does this spectacle proclaim?—"The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation."

This precious truth was testified not only in the first ages of the church, and amongst the first followers of the Saviour, but is testified in every age of the church, and amongst all the true followers of the Saviour, wheresoever dispersed over the face of the whole earth. Enter the sick chambers of the pious poor, my brethren, and there you will see the most convincing proofs that the Gospel is, indeed, the power of God unto salvation. See them patient under the acutest pains, resigned in the deepest poverty, blessing the hand which afflicts them,

the Gospel—its doctrines, its promises, its precepts. He renounces all dependence on himself, on his own works, on his own merits, on his own righteousness, and flies to the cross of his Redeemer as his only refuge. The Saviour is precious unto him, and he is ready to say with the apostle Paul, "I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." To those who thus believe, the "Gospel is the power of God unto salvation." "They receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."

Can any thus believe, my brethren, and yet live in wilful sin? By no means. The Gospel is a "doctrine according to godliness," and all who truly embrace it are taught to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." The faith which the Gospel requires is a faith which overcometh the world, which purifieth the heart, which worketh by love." If the Gospel do not purify our hearts, and influence our lives, we may be assured we have never experienced its power On all who truly embrace it, it has a transforming influence. They become new creatures in Christ Jesus. They exhibit the beauty of holiness in their whole life and conversation, and shine as lights in the world. On the due reception of the gospel depends our eternal salvation. What enquiry, therefore, my beloved brethren, can more

nearly concern you than the enquiry, Have you received the Gospel in simplicity and godly sincerity? Have we experienced it to be the power of God unto salvation? Do we treasure it up in our memories, and transcribe it into our lives? Can all around us perceive that we have been with Jesus, that we have imbibed the spirit of Jesus, and that we are walking in the steps of Jesus?

Are there any amongst my hearers who are ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, ashamed of its humiliating doctrines, ashamed of its self-denying precepts, ashamed of a crucified Saviour, and of his lowly followers. To such I would say, Hearken to the solemn declaration of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." None are ashamed of the Gospel of Christ but they who have never felt its power. True believers are so far from being ashamed of the Gospel, that they regard it as their highest glory, and their richest treasure. They have the witness in themselves that the Gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation, and therefore "they are not ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, but resolve manfully to fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's

and filled with all joy and peace in believing whilst dying and wasting away.

See the pious widow bereaved of the beloved partner of her life, strengthened, comforted, supported in the midst of her deep affliction, and saying, with her Divine Redeemer, "not my will, but thine be done."

See the pious orphan cleaving unto the Lord with full purpose of heart, and exclaiming, "When father and mother forsake me the Lord doth take me up." Who can behold such evidences as these, and not join in the declaration of the apostle, "The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation?

The faithful minister of the Gospel can testify to this truth from what he himself has witnessed. He can tell you that he has again and again seen the Gospel of Christ calm the agonies of an awakened conscience, and speak peace to the troubled mind; that he has seen it cheer the broken-hearted, and wipe away the tears of the mourning penitent; that he has seen it reconcile the sufferer to his sleepless nights, and shed rays of consolation around the bed of sickness; that he has seen it support the dearest relatives at the awful hour of separation, and mingle accents of praise with the last farewell; that he has seen it brighten the dark valley of the shadow of death, and throw the splen-

dour of heaven around the departing saint. Do not such spectacles proclaim, as with a voice from heaven, "The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation!"

III. We come now to consider the persons to whom it is the power of God unto salvation, "to every one that believeth."

The Gospel must be firmly believed and cordially embraced, before its benefits can be received, or its blessings enjoyed. It must be believed with the heart, as well as professed with the lips. It must be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of the living God. The Gospel is to the perishing sinner what the plank is to the shipwrecked mariner—his refuge from the yawning deep—his only hope of deliverance from the destruction which threatens him.

The believing spoken of in my text is not a bare acknowledgment of the truth of the Gospel in general, but a full persuasion that whatever is there written is infallibly true, as given by inspiration of God—a full persuasion that the Saviour there offered is our Saviour, that "he was wounded for our transgressions, that he was bruised for our iniquities, that the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and that by his stripes we are healed."

The true believer embraces the whole of

SERMON X.

1 TIM. III. 16.

And, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up unto glory.

THE apostle here proclaims the sum and substance of the Gospel, and sets before us a subject of unspeakable importance. May the Holy Spirit be amongst us whilst we consider,

I. The mysterious doctrine that God was manifest in the flesh.

II. The testimony borne to this doctrine; and,

III. Some of the lessons which it inculcates.

I. It is an unquestionable truth, that great is the mystery of godliness.

By the word mystery, as used in scripture, we are to understand something that could

not have been discovered by the light of reason, but must be revealed from heaven, and which, when revealed, cannot be fully comprehended by any human understanding. Of this nature is the manner in which God was manifest in the flesh. The most enlightened of the sons of men are unable to conceive how the great and glorious God, the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, who created the heavens, and the things that are therein, and the earth, and the things that are therein, and the seas, and the things that therein are, should lay aside the glory and majesty which he possessed before the worlds began, and appear in the likeness of sinful flesh. Never would such a mystery of love have entered into the heart of man, had it not been clearly and distinctly revealed. It is not my text alone which declares the Redeemer of the world to be God, one with the Father, possessed of the same perfections, equal in power, and wisdom, and dignity, God over all, blessed for ever. When the prophet Isaiah foretold "the child that should be born," the "Son that should be given," he says "*His name* shall be called *Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*" And when this precious Saviour came into the world, all the angels of God received a command to worship him.

"In the beginning was the word," says the apostle John, "and the word was with God, and the word was God;" and again, "this is the true God, and eternal life." Whilst the Gospel presents the blessed Jesus to us, as bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," and in all points tempted like as we are, it moreover presents him to us as the Creator of heaven and earth, as he who is from everlasting to everlasting, who is above all, and in all, and through all. It is the mysterious union of the divine and human nature which renders him an all-sufficient Saviour, which enabled him to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and which gave such unspeakable value to his sacrifice. As man, he shed his blood on the cross for our redemption, and as God he triumphed over satan, death, and hell. By the blood which he shed he made full satisfaction for the sins of the world; he made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness. This stupendous plan was formed by infinite wisdom, and accomplished by infinite mercy. Throughout the whole, the riches of divine grace and the wonders of divine love are displayed. So boundless are the treasures of goodness, power, and wisdom which the mystery of godliness contains, that angels desire to look unto them; and through the countless ages of eternity, the

whole ransomed world will see reason to exclaim, " O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." A doctrine so mysterious and wonderful—a doctrine which involves the temporal, spiritual, and eternal interests of the whole human race, requires the strongest evidence to assure us of its truth; and such evidence we have in abundance, as we shall clearly perceive, when we consider,

II. The testimony borne to this doctrine. The claims of our Lord Jesus Christ to the charaeter of " God manifest in the flesh," were abundantly established by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. This testimony consisted in the prophecies which foretold his coming; in the types and promises which pointed him out as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; and in the miracles which he wrought, and the example which he exhibited. " He was despised and rejected of men," he was mocked, scourged, buffetted, and put to death as a malefactor; but he was justified in the spirit. This blessed Spirit bare witness to his divinity in divers ways. First, by a chain of prophecies, commencing almost from the beginning of the world, describing the end for which he was to come, the offices which he was to sustain, the family from which he was to descend, the place where he was

to be born, the time at which he was to appear, the wonders which he was to perform, the death which he was to suffer, his resurrection from the dead, his ascent into heaven, and his exaltation to the right hand of God. These prophecies have been exactly and minutely fulfilled. In the fulness of time "the day-spring from on high" visited the world, and the sun of righteousness arose with healing in his wings. The blessed Spirit farther bore testimony to the Redeemer of the world by the numerous types which shadowed forth his coming. The various sacrifices under the law, the brazen serpent in the wilderness, the cities of refuge, and the day of atonement, all received their fulfilment in the person of our divine Redeemer. The Holy Spirit, moreover, bore witness to the Saviour of sinners by divers signs and miracles: a star pointed out his birth-place, and wise men from the east came to worship him. No sooner did he enter on his ministry than he wrought the most stupendous miracles: he opened the eyes of the blind, he unstopped the ears of the deaf, he caused the lame man to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, because he had anointed him to preach the Gospel to the poor; he had sent him to heal the broken hearted,

to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. The Spirit of truth, moreover, bore testimony to the Saviour by the excellency of the character of Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and by the excellency of the doctrine of Christ, on which was stamped the impress of the Divine wisdom in the brightest characters; and still further, by the miraculous powers which he bestowed on the apostles, and by the secret work of sanctification in the hearts of believers in all ages of the world.

2. Angels, moreover, bare witness to the divinity of our Lord. He was seen of angels. Angels were present at his entrance into the world, and celebrated his birth with songs of praise. Angels ministered unto him in his temptation, angels comforted him in his agony, angels rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, angels proclaimed his resurrection, angels were present at his ascension, and assured his disciples, that "this Jesus who was taken up from them into heaven, should so come in like manner as they had seen him go into heaven."

3. Another part of the mystery of godliness is, that Christ was preached unto the Gentiles. For many ages the light of Divine

revelation was confined to the land of Israel. The Lord made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. "When darkness covered the nations, and thick darkness the people," the Desire of all nations came to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of his people Israel." That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs with the descendants of Abraham, and "fellow citizens with the household of God;" that the Lord should be found of them that sought him not, and freely send the glad tidings of salvation to the dark places of the earth, was a mystery "which was kept secret since the world began."

4. It was, moreover, a great mystery, that one who had not where to lay his head; one who had no form nor comeliness that we should desire him, and one who was crucified as a malefactor, should be believed on in the world as the Mediator between God and man, as the Redeemer of sinners, and as the Judge of all the earth. In this precious Saviour multitudes of every age, of every sex, of every condition, have believed with full assurance of faith; have endured persecutions of every kind for his sake, and laid down their lives to testify their sincerity. The noble army of martyrs proclaimed with their expiring breath, that "God was manifest in the flesh."

5. Lastly. This important truth was confirmed by Christ being received into glory, exalted to the right hand of God, to be a prince and a Saviour. When he had finished the great work which he came into the world to perform, he was received up into glory. The gates of heaven flew open, the everlasting doors were lifted up, and the king of glory entered in. The sons of God shouted for joy; angels and archangels poured forth songs of praise, and all the glorious company of heaven joined in ascribing glory and honour, and blessing and power unto the Lamb for ever and ever. His exaltation to glory was proved by his sending down his Holy Spirit, according to his promise, to enrich his followers with a variety of precious gifts and graces, to enable them to preach the everlasting Gospel in all the several languages of the world, and to confirm the word by signs following. Every new convert to the Christian faith, every sinner turned from darkness to light, is a fresh evidence that the Lord Jesus Christ is received up into glory; since it is by his power and grace that these glorious effects are produced. We see, therefore, what abundant reasons we have to believe that "God was manifest in the flesh."

III. We come now to consider some of the lessons, which the mystery of godliness inculcates.

1. It teaches us the greatness of the salvation which is purchased for us. Why did the eternal Son of God lay aside the glory, which he had with the Father before the world began, assume our nature, and become subject to all its wants, and sufferings, and infirmities? Why did he submit to shame, and agony, and death? Why did he suffer himself to be despised and rejected of men, to be mocked, scourged, buffetted, and at last nailed to the shameful tree? It was to make that atonement for sin, which none other could make. It was to rescue myriads of immortal beings from everlasting misery, and open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. It was to spoil principalities and powers, and to make a shew of them openly. It was to display the divine perfections in the sight of the whole intelligent creation. It was to triumph over sin, and death, and hell. These benefits begin in time and endure through eternity; never can we estimate them as we ought till we enter within the vail, and join with the ransomed multitudes in ascribing glory, and honour, and power, unto him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

2. We may farther learn from the doctrine of my text, the danger of neglecting "so great salvation." Can we suppose, my brethren, that the Majesty of the universe

would have formed such a wonderful plan for our recovery, that he would have foretold it by such numerous prophecies, that he would have attested it by such astonishing miracles, that he would have accomplished it by the cross and passion of his beloved Son, and yet that we may reject this stupendous plan without incurring guilt, or exposing ourselves to danger. This can never be.—Oh! no! Wherever the Gospel of Christ is preached throughout the world, it will be found to be the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death to them that hear it. It offers the only remedy for sin, the only ransom for the captive, the only balm for the wounded, the only hope for the guilty. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." What can more nearly concern us, therefore, my beloved brethren, than to be assured that we truly believe on this all-sufficient Saviour, that we be united to him by a living faith, that we embrace him in all his offices, that we place our whole dependance on his merits, and make it our daily study to follow his example. Happy are they who thus live by the faith of the Son of God: their pardon is sealed in heaven, they have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is

the propitiation for their sins. All the blessings of time, all the glories of eternity are secured to them by a promise which can never fail. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

3. The doctrine of the incarnation farther teaches us our infinite obligations to the Redeemer. Had any man amongst us forfeited his life by rebellion against his lawful sovereign, and been condemned to suffer death by the laws of his country; and had some generous friend at the moment of execution come forward and offered to suffer in his stead; had he actually undergone the punishment incurred, and laid down his life for the ransom of his friend, could that ransomed friend ever forget such generous friendship, such disinterested love? but how much greater is the love of the compassionate Saviour to sinful man? In the redemption which he has accomplished, it was not one friend dying for another, it was not one worm suffering for another; but it was the King of Angels, the Lord of Glory, fainting, bleeding, dying, for the chief of sinners. It was the offended Sovereign ransoming the rebel with his own blood. Was ever love like unto this love? What shall we render to our compassionate Saviour, for all that he has done and suffered for us? Are we

not bound to love him with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength? Are we not bound to glorify him in our bodies and in our souls, which are his? Are we not bound to live wholly and entirely to him who died for us?

Is such, indeed, the life which we now live in the flesh? Are we dead unto sin, and alive unto God? Are we running with patience the race set before us, looking continually unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith? Are we testifying to all around us that we have been with Jesus, that we have imbibed the Spirit of Jesus, and that we are walking in the steps of Jesus? Let us not rest satisfied until we have the same mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus; till we have the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have our conversation in the world.

4. The assurance that God was manifest in the flesh, should teach the followers of Jesus to look forward to the eternal world with hopes full of immortality. He who has undertaken their cause—he who has made atonement for their sins—he who has promised to be with them always, even unto the end of the world, is "One mighty to save," one who has "all power given him in heaven, and in earth," one who has the

keys of death and of hell, "who openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." The true believer, therefore, has nothing to fear in the near views of eternity. When his heart and his flesh fail him, he knows that the God of his salvation is the strength of his heart, and will be his portion for ever. When he passes "through the valley of the shadow of death," he knows that the good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep will be with him, and that his rod and his staff will comfort him; even at the solemn hour when his immortal spirit is hovering over the very brink of eternity, he need fear no evil, for he knows that his Redeemer liveth, and is ready to receive him into endless glory, and crown him with everlasting joy.

5. We may farther learn from my text, that the mystery of the Gospel is a mystery of *godliness*. Its great design is to promote vital godliness in the hearts and lives of men; its great end is to promote "pure and undefiled religion in the world." "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." "The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

The doctrines of the Gospel are doctrines according to godliness. They come from God, and lead to God. Wherever they are cordially believed and faithfully embraced, they never fail of influencing the life and conversation, and of producing "the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope." Can we trace these effects in ourselves, my brethren? What is our hope towards God? Is Christ in us the hope of glory? And does this hope purify us even as he is pure. What trials does our faith endure, what temptations does it overcome? We see the wonderful effects of a true and living faith in those saints of old, of whom the world was not worthy, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. Rest not, my beloved brethren, in the forms and shadows of religion, but seek its divine influence and heavenly power. Seek "pure and undefiled religion," the religion of the closet, the religion of the heart, the religion of the life. Exercise yourselves unto godliness. "Be not satisfied with your present attainments in the divine life, whatever they may be, but go on from strength to strength, and grace to grace, pressing continually towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Thus will you secure "the end of your faith, even the

salvation of your souls." If God be for you, who can be against you? Whilst we are engaged in the path of duty, and living by the faith of the Son of God, we need fear no evil. "For I am persuaded that neither life nor death, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

SERMON XI.

LUKE XXII. 61, 62.

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

WHAT a touching spectacle is here presented to our view. The compassionate Saviour and the weeping penitent stand before us. The time, the place, the circumstances, all add to the interest of the scene. Jesus was now on his trial for life, surrounded with enemies, mocked, buffeted, insulted. The hour of his sufferings was come. The thorns, the nails, and the cross were before him. At this trying hour he hears the voice of a disciple three times denying him. It was that disciple who had so lately declared, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." "What is man, and wherein is he to be accounted of?" Jesus forgets his own sorrows, and for a moment his attention is

wholly engrossed by the perilous state of Peter. He beheld him on the very brink of ruin. His bowels yearned over him, and he hastened to pluck him as a brand out of the burning. "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly."

We have here a lively example of that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." It may be profitable to consider,

I. The means by which Peter's repentance was effected;
II. The fruits which it produced; and,
III. The lessons which this example teaches.

I. Our blessed Lord had forwarned Peter of the danger to which he should be exposed. He had told him that "satan had desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat;" and had informed him that "before the cock crew, he should thrice deny" his Master. The prediction was now accomplished. No sooner had Peter the third time disclaimed all knowledge of Jesus, than, "while he yet spake, the cock crew." This simple circumstance was made the instrument of first awakening his conscience. It instantly brought

to his recollection the strong profession of attachment which he had lately made to his Master, and the solemn assurance which was then given him of what his conduct would be when brought to the trial. But it was the piercing look of the divine Redeemer which was the grand instrument of his conversion. That look spoke more than any words could speak. It brought all his guilt before him, and in a moment shewed him his fallen and ruined state. It was a *convincing* look. It seemed to say to him, "Dost thou not *know* me, Peter? Dost thou not know him who has loved thee with an everlasting love—him who called thee to be an apostle, to preach the everlasting Gospel, and to be a witness of his transfiguration on the mount, when there came to him such a voice from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" It was further, an *expostulating* look: "Dost thou, who so lately declaredst that thou wouldst die with me, rather than deny me, now say that thou never knewest me?—thou who didst eat of my bread, and drink of my cup?—thou who didst hear the gracious words which proceeded out of my lips?—thou who didst daily join with me in prayer and praise, who didst so often behold me opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf;—dost thou not know me?" It was,

moreover, a *compassionate* look. It spoke tenderness and love. It assured the apostle that though he had so grievously offended, and had fallen so low, yet there was mercy for him; that, though he had forgotten the Saviour, yet the Saviour still remembered him. Peter fully understood the meaning of this expressive look. His heart was touched. He could no longer stand in the presence of his injured Master. He "went out and wept bitterly." Power accompanied the look. The Holy Spirit conveyed it to his heart, and caused it to make an impression never to be effaced. "Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." The spirit of grace works by the word, brings it home to the conscience, and makes it effectual in turning sinners from the error of their ways.

Thus we see the means by which the apostle was awakened to a sense of his guilt and his danger. We come next to consider,

II. The fruits which his repentance produced.

The crowing of the cock, and the look of the Saviour, attended with power from on high, wrought effectually in the heart of Peter, brought his sin to remembrance, humbled him to the dust, and constrained him to go out and weep bitterly. Here, my bre-

thren, was the beginning of his repentance. His eyes were now opened to see his lost and ruined condition—to see his baseness and ingratitude to such a master and such a friend—one who had so tenderly loved him—one who had borne with his infirmities, watched over him, prayed with him, admonished him, and who was now about to lay down his life for him. All the aggravations of his crime rushed upon his mind. He felt that it was committed against light, and knowledge, and conviction; against the most solemn vows and the most earnest protestations. And now the language of his inmost soul was, "Guilty, guilty: behold, I am vile; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The sorrow of the apostle was "godly sorrow." He was grieved because he had grieved the God of his salvation. He was ready to say with the penitent Psalmist, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." His was that broken and contrite heart which the Lord will not despise. When the rod of Moses smote the rock in the wilderness, the waters gushed out; and when the Holy Spirit smites the conscience of the sinner, tears of repentance flow. Peter wept; he wept bitterly: his sorrow was deep, acute, overwhelming. It was, moreover, secret. He retired from the sight of all men. He went

out and wept. He poured out his heart in such language as this: "How grievously have I offended against my God! I, a disciple, an apostle; I, who so lately acknowledged my master to be Christ the Lord; and who so solemnly protested my readiness to die for his sake, have yet denied him with oaths and imprecations! Lord, pity: Lord, pardon: Lord, forgive." Peter's sorrow was immediately followed by steadfast purposes to lead a new life, by a solemn renewal of his covenant with God, and by an entire surrender of himself to his Lord and Master. He was now deeply conscious of his own weakness. He had experienced the utter worthlessness of his best resolutions, and had learnt, by his fall, that of himself he could do nothing. All his dependance now was on the strength and righteousness of his Redeemer. His repentance was attended with deep humility and increasing love to this precious Redeemer. When Jesus, after his resurrection, demanded of him, "Lovest thou me?" we no longer hear his confident profession, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." But he says, in the sincerity of his heart, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." His love was sincere, fervent, active, abiding. He was now, indeed, ready to die for the sake of Jesus. His time, his life,

his all, were devoted to the service of the Saviour. With what boldness did he confess him before those very rulers who with wicked hands had crucified and slain him! How courageously did he proclaim him, wherever he went, as the Lord of Glory, the Prince of Life, the Redeemer of the World! Peter, who, during his fall, appeared weaker than a bruised reed, afterwards stood firm as a rock in the cause of Christ. To the last hour of his continuance upon earth, he laboured incessantly to advance the glory of God and the salvation of sinners. Behold him travelling from city to city, preaching Jesus and the resurrection, and calling upon all men every where to repent. When he knew that the time of his departure was at hand, and that he "was shortly to put off his earthly tabernacle," he endeavoured, by his writings, that his Christian brethren "might be able, after his decease, to have the things" which he had taught them "always in remembrance." And, finally, he sealed his testimony with his blood.

The repentance of Peter was truly repentance unto salvation not to be repented of. It had every ingredient in it which could render it effectual. It was speedy: it was secret: it was sincere: it was lasting and abiding: and brought forth abundantly fruits meet for repentance.

III. Numerous and important are the lessons which his example teaches.

1. It teaches us the necessity of lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, if we would obtain pardon and peace. No sooner did the Lord turn and look upon Peter, than Peter went out and wept bitterly. There is a weeping for sins which is ever found in every true penitent; a weeping for sins as committed against God, the tenderest of fathers, and the best of friends. It does not spring merely from the fear of punishment, nor from the fatal effects which sin produces; but from a deep conviction of having offended the kindest of Benefactors, pierced the Saviour who loved us even unto death, grieved the Spirit of Grace, and violated the law of God, which is holy, just, and good. Such was the sorrow of David, when he watered his couch with tears, and exclaimed, "Have mercy upon me, O God; according to thy loving-kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." Such is the sorrow of all who truly repent. Every sinful temper which they have indulged, every unprofitable word which they have uttered, every evil action which they have committed, swells the torrent of their grief. The penitent exclaims, in the bitterness of his spirit, "I have rebelled against that God whom angels adore

I have sinned against him who has fed me ever since I was born, and who daily loadeth me with his benefits. I have broken his laws. I have defied his judgments. I have despised his mercies; and there is no health in me." This godly sorrow must be wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, who alone "convinces the world of sin." It is he who softens the hearts, and opens the eyes of sinners, to "look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn." When they behold this precious Saviour with the eye of faith, when they consider who it was that suffered, even the Lord of life and glory; when they consider why he suffered, even to make atonement for their sins; they then mourn as one that mourneth for an only son.

But it is not our sorrow, my brethren, however acute, nor our tears, however abundant, which can expiate our sins, or wash away our guilt. Oh, no. It is "the blood of Jesus Christ alone which cleanseth from all sin." It is through the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction which he made on Mount Calvary, that any sinner can be pardoned, cleansed, justified. The sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of, leadeth us to the cross of the Saviour, where alone we obtain mercy and pardon, where alone we obtain "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

2. The example of Peter further teaches us, that repentance consists not barely in sorrow for sin, but in a change of heart and life. We must do works meet for repentance, my brethren, or all our sorrow for sin, all our humiliations, all our confessions, will go for nothing. Ahab put on sackcloth, and humbled himself to the dust. Judas bitterly lamented the crime which he had committed, and made open confession of his guilt. Felix trembled, whilst Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." But none of these were true penitents. No real change was produced in their hearts; no permanent conversion appeared in their lives. Till the drunkard become sober; till the proud be clothed with humility; till the covetous be "ready to give and glad to communicate;" and "they that stole steal no more;" there is no real repentance wrought in any one of them. No man sincerely grieves for having committed sin whilst he continues in sin. No man truly repents who does not "abhor that which is evil, and cleave unto that which is good." Remorse is not repentance. Conviction is not conversion. Sorrow for sin is not forsaking of sin. The true penitent gives abundant evidence that sin has no longer dominion over him. He shews to all around him that he has become "a new creature; that old things are passed

away, and all things are become new." Mark the wonderful change which was wrought in the apostle Peter from the hour in which he went out and wept bitterly. He who trembled at the very appearance of danger, was now bold as a lion. He who thrice denied his Lord and Master, is now ready to confess him before the kings and rulers of the earth. He who followed Jesus afar off, is now ready to cleave unto him even unto death. Here, my brethren, is true repentance. The Spirit of grace says to every sinner upon earth, "Go, and do thou likewise."

3. The example of Peter affords abundant encouragement to repent. His guilt was of no ordinary kind. He had shamefully and ungratefully forsaken his Master in the hour of his deep distress. He had again and again disowned him in the presence of his enemies, and had added perjury to his ingratitude. Yet, on his true repentance, all was forgiven him. "As far as the east is from the west, so far did the Lord remove his sins from him." The compassionate Saviour, who turned and looked upon Peter, no sooner beheld him mourning for his sins and lamenting his iniquities, than he freely forgave him all. Thus, my brethren, we see that Jesus can pardon where the most merciful of his creatures would condemn; that

Jesus can succour where the kindest of the human race would abandon; that Jesus can comfort, when the tenderest friend upon earth would forsake.

The forgiveness of sins is the grand blessing which he has purchased for a lost and ruined world. The stupendous plan of redemption was formed that we might obtain forgiveness of sins. Apostles preached, angels ministered, Jesus died, that we might obtain forgiveness of sins. This inestimable mercy will be celebrated by innumerable multitudes of ransomed sinners through the countless ages of eternity. With united hearts and tongues, they will be continually ascribing "blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, to the Lamb who was slain, and who washed them from their sins in his own blood." Let no penitent, therefore, despair of obtaining pardon through this all-sufficient Saviour. Whilst the heart-broken sinner is mourning on earth, angels are rejoicing over him in heaven. Whilst with Peter he goes out and weeps bitterly, Jesus says to him, with the still small voice of love, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee."

4. The example of Peter teaches us to repent without delay.

No sooner was he reminded by the look of his Saviour of the guilt which he had

contracted, and the danger to which he was exposed, than he immediately humbled himself before his God, and earnestly sought for mercy and pardon. Had he stifled his convictions, and deferred his repentance to a future period, the precious opportunity would have been lost, and lost for ever. The Saviour of sinners might never again have looked upon him with the eye of compassion. The Holy Spirit might never again have visited him with his restoring grace, and the Father of mercies might never again have granted him repentance unto life. But he hastened to repent; and with strong crying and tears, instantly sought reconciliation with his offended God. His cries were heard; his tears were regarded. The all-prevailing Advocate interceded for him, and his pardon was sealed in heaven. Every thing persuades the sinner to immediate repentance. Both the promises and the threatenings of the Lord persuade him. While he continues in his sins, all is darkness and despair. Wherever he directs his view, he beholds something to terrify him. Does he look upwards? He beholds an offended God. Downwards? He beholds the bottomless pit ready to receive him. Backwards? He sees the numerous sins which he has committed, and the rich mercies which he has abused. Forwards?

He beholds an awful tribunal and a tremendous eternity. All these objects cry, as with a voice of thunder, "Repent and be converted, that thy sins may be blotted out." The agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, of the dying Saviour repeat the call.

Repentance is universally necessary. "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." The whole creation must plead guilty before him. Who amongst us has not again and again practically denied the Saviour? With great reason does our church call upon all her members to beseech the Father of mercies to "grant them true repentance and his Holy Spirit," to "create and make in them new and contrite hearts," "to have mercy upon them, miserable sinners." In these petitions, my beloved brethren, we all join, sabbath after sabbath: but do we lay them to heart? Do we feel the burden of our sins? Do we truly repent of all our misdoings? Our repentance is not to be confined to the period of our first entrance on the Christian life, but is to be exercised through the whole of our pilgrimage upon earth. Our blessed Lord has taught us to seek the forgiveness of our daily trespasses as duly as we seek the supply of our daily food. The saints in glory are they alone who can say, our repentance is finished. One of the brightest ornaments of the Chris-

tian church, Archbishop Usher, was accustomed to express a desire that he might die with the language of the publican on his lips. And, accordingly, we are informed that his last words were, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Let such be the language of your hearts, my beloved brethren, in life and in death. Defer not the important duty of repentance to a more convenient season. Be assured no season can be more convenient than the present solemn season.* Be persuaded, therefore, to devote it to the great ends for which it was set apart. Let it be to you a season of humiliation, of self-examination, and of prayer. In all your approaches to the throne of grace, look to that precious Saviour, who ever liveth to make intercession for you. And earnestly seek the renewing influences of that blessed Spirit which are freely promised to all who ask them. Then will you be able to testify from your own experience, that there is no burden so heavy that this comforter cannot lighten; no cup so bitter that he cannot sweeten; no wound so deadly that he cannot heal. Then will your compassionate Saviour give you "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

* Lent.

SERMON XII.

JER. VIII. 22.

Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

THE world is represented in Scripture as one large hospital, where some are full of wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores; others in a state of recovery, and others sick even unto death. What has produced such awful effects in a world created and governed by a God of infinite mercy and unbounded love? Sin has produced these awful effects. Every disease of body, and every disease of mind, may be traced to sin as its fatal cause; but is there no remedy for this pestilence that walketh in darkness? Blessed be God there is. My text points out the remedy in those solemn questions, "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why

then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"

May the Holy Spirit assist our meditations whilst we consider,

I. The spiritual maladies of mankind.
II. The remedy provided for these maladies, and,
III. The answer to the enquiry, Why is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

I. When man proceeded from the hands of his Creator, he was free from every taint of corruption, he was sound in body, and sound in mind. All within was peace, and all without was joy and gladness. But no sooner did he transgress the commandment of his God than a train of dismal diseases began to prevail. He who was made but a little lower than the angels, became an outcast from the presence of his God, banished from the bright scenes of Paradise, and sent forth to wander in a blighted world a lost, a wretched, dying sinner. From that period to the present hour all his posterity have been partakers of his sin, and shared in his misery. The divine image has been effaced, the glory has departed, and the beauty of holiness has been laid in the dust. It is not the page of inspiration alone which testifies that all have sinned. Every

history of man, whether recording the transactions of the most enlightened, or the proceedings of the most degraded of nations, whether tracing the progress of barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, presents to our view the most convincing evidences of the universal corruption of the human race. These histories are little more than the records of crimes, of misery, and of death. But it is not necessary to go back to past ages for proof of man's depravity. Every part of the habitable globe, at the present day, exhibits proofs upon proofs of this mournful truth. We have only to look around us to behold the variety of spiritual diseases which every where prevail; the raging fever of intemperance, the slow-consuming canker of envy and malice, the blindness of unbelief, the palsy of avarice, and the lethargy of sloth. The souls of all are infected with sin as with a grievous distemper. In every bosom may be found "a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." In all we discover symptoms of spiritual disease. Some appear dying and wasting away, whilst others, though recovering, still bear about them marks of their malady. Our own consciences, if we faithfully consult them, bear witness that we are encompassed with a body of sin and of death. The apostle Paul has fully established the truth of man's corruption

in the introductory chapters of his epistle to the Romans. He has there clearly shewn that "there is none righteous, no not one;" that "death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." The whole world hath become guilty before God. Whilst the sinner flatters himself that all is well, the hidden disease preys upon his vitals; it grows stronger and stronger, and spreads wider and wider, but he knows not of it till the Holy Spirit, by the preaching of the word, by some awful providence, or by some other instrument, awakens him to a sense of his danger, and constrains him to exclaim, "What must I do to be saved?" He then regards sin as his grief, his burden, his disease, and desires, above all things, to be delivered from this worst of enemies.

Our bodily diseases are not more numerous and various than our spiritual diseases. We have each of us our peculiar infirmity, "the sin which does most easily beset us." Each of us labours under a fatal malady,—a malady which, unless timely cured, will end in temporal, spiritual, and eternal death. What, therefore, can more nearly concern us than to learn,

2. *The remedy provided for these maladies.* "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?"

Gilead was celebrated for its medicinal productions, its healing balms, and salutary

spices. These were so many types and emblems of the abundant provision which God has made in the everlasting Gospel, for the healing of the spiritual maladies of his people. There, "without money, and without price," he offers a remedy for every disease, and a balm for every wound. There he proclaims free and full salvation to the chief of sinners. In vain are human inventions sought after. The healing of the wounded conscience is from God alone. "Heal my soul, O Lord," says the Psalmist, "for I have sinned against thee." Men are ready to apply their own remedies to cure the wounds which sin has inflicted. They have recourse to prayers, to fastings, to mortifications, to alms-givings; they go about to establish their own righteousness whilst they refuse to submit themselves to the righteousness of God, but all their endeavours are in vain. The blood of Christ is the only balm which can heal the sinner, the only sacrifice which can atone for his transgressions, the only fountain which can cleanse him from his sin. At the cross of the Saviour we find a healing spring,—a spring to cleanse and wash our guilt away. The most inveterate maladies yield to the balm which is in Gilead. Let this be applied by a true and living faith, and the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the blind receive their sight, the dumb speak, and the

halt and the maimed leap for joy; the whole man becomes renewed and restored to perfect soundness.

As there is balm in Gilead, so is there a *physician* there. This title is peculiarly suited to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great Physician of souls, who came down from heaven into a sick and dying world with ample power to heal "all manner of sickness and all manner of disease," both of body and soul. It is the office of this precious Saviour to raise them who are "dead in trespasses and sins" to newness of life, to heal all their diseases, to bear all their infirmities, and to prepare them for those blessed regions where none of the inhabitants shall any more say I am sick. "Christ loved the church," saith the apostle, "and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."

The blessed Jesus is fully qualified to act as our spiritual Physician.

1. He is possessed of abundant skill, for "in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He is intimately acquainted with every fibre in our frame, with all our sinful propensities, with all our evil habits,

with all our infirmities, and all our maladies. He knows the true remedies for them all, and the effectual methods of accomplishing our cure. Though our outward man perish, yet under his direction our inward man shall be renewed day by day. He appoints the very remedy which our case requires. If we be sleeping on the brink of eternity, in the lethargy of sin, he sends some alarming affliction which calls to us as with a voice of thunder, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." If we be cleaving to the creature with idolatrous attachment, he dashes our idols in pieces, and constrains us to repair "to the Fountain of living waters." If we be blinded by the delusions of the world, the flesh, and the devil, he "anoints our eyes with eye-salve that we may see," and shews us that "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," is altogether vanity and vexation of spirit.

2. As our great *Physician* possesses skill, he moreover possesses power to heal all our maladies. He has all power in heaven, and in earth. "God has put all things under his feet, and given him to be Head over all things to the church." No disease, therefore, however desperate, can be beyond his power to cure. The multitudes of impotent folk whom he healed while on earth, are so many

witnesses of his ability to heal. None ever applied to him in vain. When the leper approached him, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," he instantly replied, "I will, be thou clean; and immediately his leprosy was cleansed." When the woman who had been afflicted many years with disease touched the hem of his garment, she felt within herself that she was healed. When they brought unto him "people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those who were possessed with devils, and those who were lunatic, he healed them all. These are so many monuments of the skill and power of Jesus to heal every spiritual malady under which his people labour.

3. In vain, however, are we assured of his skill, unless he also possess willingness to heal. Of his willingness to heal he has given us abundant evidences. What proofs could we desire, my brethren, of his willingness to save which he has not already afforded us? Did not he "who was rich, for our sakes become poor, that we through his poverty might be rich?" Did he not leave the joys and glories which he possessed from all eternity—assume our nature—and in that nature suffer, bleed, and die for us and for our salvation? Let his agony and bloody sweat—let his tears and groans—let his streaming

blood and piercing cries, declare his willingness to save all who apply to him. His repeated invitations and his gracious promises to those who labour and are heavy laden with the burden of their sins, confirm his willingness to save. We find him at all times and on all occasions ready to bind up the broken-hearted, to heal the diseased, and comfort all that mourn. Every action of his life proclaimed his willingness no less than his ability to save. He took our sicknesses and carried our infirmities. To every one who applies to him for cure he says, "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds." Of his church he says, "I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it. I will keep it night and day." Thus, my brethren, you see how fully qualified the blessed Jesus is to heal all our spiritual maladies. He is powerful, and he is willing to heal. We may confidently ask, therefore, "Is there" not "balm in Gilead," "Is there" not a "Physician there?"

III. We come now to consider the answer to the enquiry, "Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"

The Lord is here represented as a tender father mourning over the sickness of a beloved daughter. He beholds her dying and wasting away, and anxiously enquires, Why is not her health recovered? How is it that

the remedies for spiritual maladies are not applied, and that the sufferers do not eagerly seek for them?

1. The most general reason is, that they are not conscious of their malady, and therefore neglect the healing balm of the Gospel. None apply to the Physician till they feel themselves sick. When our Lord was upon earth, multitudes thronged around him to be healed, but they were such as were suffering under diseases of divers kinds; the lepers came to be cleansed of their leprosy, the blind came that they might receive their sight, the deaf came that they might receive their hearing, and the lame that they might be restored to soundness. All these felt their respective maladies, and earnestly sought for relief. Thus too it is with all who feel their spiritual diseases. How earnestly do such look out for relief. How repeated is their enquiry, "Men and brethren, what must we do? but till the eyes of sinners be opened to see their lost and ruined condition, they ask for no remedy, they seek for no relief, and this is one of the principal reasons why their health is not restored.

2. Another reason is, that when sinners are in a measure awakened to a sense of their danger, they prefer remedies of their own to the remedy which the Gospel offers. They are ready to say with Naaman, "are not

Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean?" They will rend their garments with Ahab—they will fast, they will lie in sackcloth and ashes, they will practise the severest mortifications rather than apply the balm which is in Gilead, rather than come to the Physician who is there. They feel that the fiery serpent has bitten them, and that they are dying of their wounds; but they cannot be persuaded to look to the brazen serpent, which is lifted up for their healing, and therefore they are not healed. Sinners will not come to the Saviour, till, like the woman in the Gospel, they have spent all that they have, and find that they are nothing better but rather worse; they are then constrained to touch the hem of his garment, that they may be healed.

3. Another reason why the spiritual health of sinners is not recovered is, that they are so enslaved to sin, as to prefer their disease to their remedy, their vile bondage to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Their hearts are wholly engrossed by the world, and the things of the world; they seek all their enjoyment in "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." To attempt to deprive them of these they regard, as an attempt to rob them of their happiness,

to dash their idols in pieces, and what have they more? They cannot be persuaded to come to the Fountain of living waters, so long as they are satisfied with their broken cisterns. They cannot be persuaded to come to the Physician, so long as they cherish their disease and fear to be healed.

4. Others hate the Physician, and the remedy which he offers. The adversary of souls raises in their minds groundless prejudices against the Saviour, and represents him as a hard task-master reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed. So far, therefore, from regarding the blessed Jesus as "the chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely," they can see "no form nor comeliness" in him, that they should desire him. The language of their hearts is, "We will not have this man, that he may reign over us." No wonder, therefore, my brethren, that sinners who thus despise and hate the Saviour, should receive none of the healing benefits which he so freely offers.

5. One of the most frequent causes why the spiritual health of sinners is not recovered is, that they defer the great concern of their salvation from day to day. They feel their disease, they are conscious of their danger, and they resolve at some future period to apply to the spiritual Physician,

but not yet. Whilst they delay, the malady is increasing, the symptoms become more alarming, and death is rapidly approaching. Precious opportunities are lost, gracious invitations are neglected, and their case every hour becomes more hopeless. Such, my brethren, are some of the principal answers to the enquiry in my text, "Why is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" It is not that there is any defect in the remedy provided. It is not that there is any want of ability or willingness in the Redeemer, to save to the uttermost.—Oh! no. There is abundant virtue in a crucified Saviour, to heal all our diseases. Sinful and guilty as we are, by nature and by practice, in him there is "plenteous redemption." If our spiritual maladies, therefore, be not healed, the fault is altogether our own. The most efficacious remedies are of no avail, unless they be applied. The most skilful physician cannot heal the patient, if he refuse to be healed; but why will any one amongst us neglect the precious remedies which are so freely offered? Why will any one amongst us refuse to be healed? No reason can be assigned for such neglect, no apology can be offered for such refusal.

Suffer your minister now, my brethren, to address a word of exhortation to the different classes of sinners, whose case we have been considering. And,

1. To those who are unconscious of their malady. Could you be persuaded to search into the records of your consciences, to look back on the days that are past, and to call to mind your numerous sins of omission and of commission, your sins against God, your sins against your neighbour, and your sins against yourselves, you would see abundant reason to confess with the Psalmist, that your sins are "more in number, than the hairs of your head;" and to exclaim with him, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." In vain do you conceal your sins from the sight of men, in vain do you endeavour to conceal them from yourselves, you cannot conceal them from the sight of God, "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." Your disease is not less real, is not less fatal, because you strive to forget it. It is daily taking deeper and deeper root, the leprosy is spreading wider and wider, and your danger is hourly increasing. Be persuaded therefore, without delay, to apply the remedy, to seek now for the balm which is in Gilead; and to come now to the Physician who is there, and be assured he will in no wise cast you out.

2. To those who are seeking to heal themselves by remedies of their own invention, I

would say, cease from such deceitful vanities. They will deceive you to your everlasting ruin. No balm can ever heal your wounds, but the balm that is in Gilead, no Physician can ever restore your health, but the physician who is there. The Spirit of truth hath solemnly declared, that there is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is his blood alone which cleanses from all sin. That precious blood, which has already washed away the guilt of myriads of the vilest of sinners, will wash away your guilt if you renounce all dependence on yourselves, and come to him with broken and contrite hearts, no longer going about to establish your own righteousness, and refusing to submit to the righteousness of God.

3. Are there amongst my hearers, any who prefer their disease to their recovery; any who seek their happiness not in the favour of God, not in the service of Christ, not in the consolations of the Holy Spirit, but in the vanities of the world, in the gratification of appetite, and in the pleasures of sin? I would appeal to their own hearts, whether they have ever found any real enjoyment in these things, and is it for such things you barter your spiritual health? Is it for such things you barter the peace of your con-

sciences, and the salvation of your souls? Look to the dying Saviour, till you mourn for those sins which pierced him. "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die?"

4. To those who neither value the Physician, nor the remedy which he offers, he himself says, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life. Ye will not receive the great salvation, which I have purchased for you. Ye will not lay hold on the eternal life, which is so freely offered you." What can be more unreasonable than such conduct as this? How different the conduct of those who are groaning under bodily diseases. They take long and expensive journies, for the recovery of their health, they apply to the most skilful physicians, and they submit to the most painful remedies; and will not you, who are wasting and dying under the leprosy of sin, use any means for your recovery? Will you refuse the help of the Physician, who invites you again and again, to come to him? Will you cast away the remedy, which would infallibly restore you? How can you escape if you neglect so great salvation?

5. To those who defer their application to the great Physician from day to day, I

would say, your case is unspeakably alarming. Your disease is every hour growing stronger and stronger, whilst the time for recovery is every hour growing shorter and shorter. To-day you have free access to the balm which is in Gilead, to the Physician who is there, but you know not what a day may bring forth. Before to-morrow's sun arise, the messenger of death may overtake you, and all your pious resolutions be gone for ever. If you ever hope to have your spiritual maladies cured, you must seek the cure without delay. Remember you have immortal souls to be saved, numerous sins to be forgiven, deadly diseases to be healed, and eternal life to be obtained. Remember the tremendous state of all who die in their sins, and be persuaded this very day to apply to the Physician who is in Gilead, in the words of the blind man in the Gospel, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me;" and in the words of the leper, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Suffer me, finally, to address a word of exhortation to those amongst us, who are in a weak state of spiritual health, but are anxiously desirous to be restored to perfect soundness. Be assured, my beloved brethren, that he who has begun a good work in you is faithful, and will perform it unto

the great day, but he works by means, by his word and ordinances, and by the sanctifying influences of his Holy Spirit. Be constant, therefore, and earnest in the use of the appointed means. "Forsake not the assembling yourselves together, as the manner of some is." Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures, pray without ceasing, and above all seek an abundant supply of the Spirit of grace to heal your distempers, to strengthen your infirmities, and to confirm you unto the end that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON XIII.

MARK I. 35.

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

To trace the footsteps of our Divine Redeemer through every stage of his pilgrimage upon earth, is highly interesting, and peculiarly instructive. A shining light seems to mark the path which he trode. Whilst his public life presents an uninterrupted succession of labours of love, his private life exhibits a beautiful example of deep and fervent devotion. His heart continually pointed to heaven, and his spirit incessantly ascended to the throne of his Father. He suffered no hour to pass away unemployed. Never for a moment did he lose sight of the great end for which he came into the world, even to save sinners, to make recon-

ciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness. Whilst we look to the cross of this precious Saviour as the only ground of our acceptance with God, we must look to his life as the perfect pattern for our imitation. Every passage in his history teaches us lessons of high importance. The passage which now calls for our consideration is fraught with instruction of deep interest.

May the Holy Spirit be amongst us whilst we proceed to consider,

I. The example of early rising which our Lord hath left us in the text.

II. The improvement which he has taught us to make of our morning hours. And,

III. Our obligations to follow this holy example.

I. When we consider the number and variety of the labours of the blessed Jesus, his journeyings, his miracles, his preachings, we are constrained to enquire how it was possible for him to accomplish so much in so short a space of time. The words of my text in a great measure solve the difficulty. They present the Saviour to our view zealously and devoutly improving those precious hours which so many consume in unnecessary sleep. After a day of incessant em-

ployment, after having healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; after having engaged in these offices of love till a late hour of the night, we find him rising the next morning a great while before day. Nor does this appear to have been a solitary instance in the history of our Lord, but early rising seems to have been his habitual and uniform practice. On another occasion we read, that "when it was day he departed and went into a desert place;" and again, "when it was day he called unto him his disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;" and again, we read that "all the people came early in the morning unto him in the temple for to hear him." He whose meat it was to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work, knew the value of morning hours; he knew that the earliest part of the day is the best part of the day, and the fittest for every important labour and undertaking. Never did the rising sun see him slumbering on his pillow. At the earliest dawn he was found on the solitary mountain, engaged in fervent prayer, or within the courts of the temple, instructing the people in the things pertaining to salvation. The importance of the stupendous undertaking in which he was engaged, appears to have been continually before his eyes. His ear-

liest and his latest hours bear inscribed that solemn declaration, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh wherein no man can work."

In every period of the world the practice of early rising has prevailed amongst the faithful servants of the Lord. We read that Abraham rose up early in the morning to execute the severest command that was ever given to any of the sons of men. We read that Jacob rose up early in the morning, after he was favoured with the heavenly vision on his way to Haran. We read that Moses rose up early in the morning, to deliver the message from the Lord to Pharaoh; and of Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, and Jeremiah we read that they were all early risers. Of Job we read, that he rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of his children, and thus did he continually. We are informed that Nehemiah and his fellow-workers laboured from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.

Each of these holy men has left us an example of early rising which well deserves our imitation; but above all, the blessed Jesus has left us an example of early rising which calls for peculiar attention. He has moreover taught us,

II. The improvement which we are re-

quired to make of our morning hours: "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." The holy Jesus abounded in the high and important exercise of secret prayer. Often did the rising sun see him with uplifted heart, and hands, and eyes, pouring out his soul to his Heavenly Father; and often was the silence of the night interrupted by his fervent supplications; and herein hath he left us an example that we should follow his steps. Prayer is the very life and breath of the Christian. It is suited to all times, to all places, to all conditions, but it is peculiarly suited to the first hours of the day. The return of every morning calls for supplications and thanksgivings. The curtain of darkness is then withdrawn, and a new world of wonders bursts upon our view. The heavens, then, in an especial manner, declare the glory of God, and the firmament then distinctly sheweth his handy work. The sun cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. The whole creation seems to revive, and at the present season in particular, presents an infinite variety of beautiful and interesting objects to view. The morning cloud, fringed with colours of the brightest hue; the early dew bespangling the earth with its brilliant

gems; the countless multitudes of insects, buzzing in the air; the cheerful notes of the feathered choirs, and the cattle grazing on a thousand hills, all point to the great Preserver, who is good, and doeth good, who openeth his hand wide, and filleth all things living with plenteousness. Ought not our earliest thoughts, our earliest affections, and our earliest praises, to be dedicated to him whose mercies are new every morning, and who daily loadeth us with his benefits? When we awake up is not the Lord still with us? Has he not been about our beds through the watches of the night, shielding, and guarding, and protecting us? In sleep every sense is locked up, and every faculty suspended. We lie a helpless prey to every enemy, and exposed to every accident, ignorant of our condition, and unconscious of our danger. Though the pestilence that walketh in darkness should be approaching us, we know not of it; though the destroying angel should invade our dwelling, we perceive it not. In these defenceless circumstances, how wholly do we depend on the care of the Shepherd of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps. On awaking, therefore, from such a state, strengthened and refreshed, is it not shameful ingratitude to forget the hand that protected us, and the eye that watched over us? Whoever

has known what it is to pass sleepless nights, to count the tedious hours as they strike on the dull ear of night, and to be full of tossings to and fro till the dawning of the day, can tell the value of sound and balmy sleep, and duly prize the blessing when restored. And shall we enjoy this invaluable blessing, night after night, and not rise from our beds early, to pay our morning sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Behold the royal Psalmist, amidst the various distractions of business, and the weighty cares of his kingdom, devoting his earliest hours to his Creator, and consecrating the first-fruits of every day to the God of his salvation. "My voice," says he, "shalt thou hear betimes, O Lord; early in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." No time, my brethren, is more suitable to direct our prayer unto the Lord, than early in the morning. The powers of both body and mind are then in their most vigorous state. The noise and bustle of the world are for a while suspended. All around is still and quiet. The freshness of the morning is upon us, and every object presents subjects for meditation, prayer, and praise. When we reflect on the vast train of events which occur during every night that passeth by; when we consider the various changes and chances which have

taken place whilst our eyes have been closed in sleep; when we consider how many of our fellow creatures have been shipwrecked at sea, and how many have suffered fatal calamities on land; how many have passed painful and sleepless nights, and how many have been hurried into eternity unwarned, uncounselled, and unprepared, whilst we ourselves are spared to see the light of another day in health, and peace, and comfort, how can we forbear exclaiming with the Psalmist, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits which he hath done unto me? I will receive the cup of salvation. Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth me with benefits, even the God of our salvation." Well may the voice of joy and thanksgiving be heard in those dwellings where the whole family meet at the opening day in the full possession of health and strength, and in the peaceful enjoyment of innumerable blessings. Let every member of such families adopt the language of the pious Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name."

III. Numerous and powerful are our obligations to follow the example which our Divine Redeemer has left us of early rising and early devotion.

1. It concerns us to follow this example, if we would enjoy health of body or health

of mind. There are few things more injurious to both than indulgence in unnecessary sleep. The whole creation seems to reproach the sluggard, extended on the bed of sloth. The various tribes of animals, bounding over the plains at the dawn of day; the numerous choirs of birds, pouring forth their early strains; the holy angels, who are incessantly employed in worshipping the Lord of Hosts in heaven, or ministering to the heirs of salvation on earth; the spirits of just men made perfect, who are ever before the throne serving the God of their salvation day and night in his temple; all seem to cry aloud in the ears of the sluggard, "What meanest thou, O sleeper; arise, and call upon thy God." The whole tenor of the gospel condemns indulgence in immoderate sleep. How inconsistent is such indulgence with self-denial, with taking up our cross, and following Christ. "Every man that striveth for the mastery," saith the apostle, "is temperate in all things," and consequently temperate in sleep. Immoderate sleep disables us from enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. It robs us of that time which might have been employed in putting on the whole armour of God, and preparing to run with patience the race set before us. Above all, it renders us unlike that precious Saviour whose meat and drink it was to do the will

of his Father, and to work the works of him who sent him, while it was day.

2. It concerns us to rise early, if we would grow in wisdom and spiritual understanding. Many of my hearers are ready to complain that they are so wholly engaged in procuring the necessaries of life for themselves and for their families that they have few opportunities of entering into their closets and praying to their Father in secret, few opportunities of searching the scriptures, and increasing in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The habit of early rising, my brethren, would afford you the most favourable opportunities for these important purposes. Great is the progress which you might make in divine knowledge by rising every day one hour earlier than you have been accustomed to rise, and spending that hour in holy reading, meditation, and prayer. At the close of every year you could then reckon three hundred and sixty-five hours improved to the great ends for which life was given, bearing on their wings, " glory, and honour, and immortality." Be persuaded to make the trial, and if you commit a portion of scripture to memory in the first hour of every day, you will find it of incalculable use. It will be a guide to you through the various events of the day, affording you strength and consolation under your trials and afflictions, and

with "a still small voice" persuading you to go on in the path of duty, and to press continually towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It was early in the morning that the Israelites, in the wilderness, gathered the manna; and the best time for gathering the heavenly manna, the bread which endureth to everlasting life, is early in the morning.

3. The strict and solemn account which we must all render of our time at the great tribunal should constrain us to the practice of early rising. Every fragment of time must be accounted for in the awful day of reckoning. The impartial Judge will demand of every individual, How have the days of thy youth been spent? How has the period of manhood been employed? How have the first hours of every day been improved? The sluggard will be overwhelmed with speechless confusion when the large catalogue is spread before him of the hours which he has consumed in unnecessary sleep, and the golden opportunities of salvation which are lost, and lost for ever. How earnestly will he desire to recall the hours that are past and gone. How earnestly will he wish that he had spent them in the service of God, and in the work of his salvation. Would you know, my brethren, the true value of one hour of precious time, visit the chambers of

the dying, and listen to the lamentations of the expiring sinner. The hours of his life which were spent in sloth, in folly, and in sin, rise up before him as so many spectres, pointing to those fearful abodes where no sounds are heard but "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." When the awakened sinner hears the clock strike the last hour of his mortal life, every moment seems to him of more value than "thousands of gold and silver." With what earnestness does he exclaim, "Oh, for another year, another month, another day;" but all in vain. His years, and months, and days, are gone for ever, and an awful eternity opens upon him. This is no imaginary scene, but one which has been witnessed again and again, and one which cries aloud in the ears of every careless sinner, "Improve the accepted time, work while it is day, rise from the bed of sloth, and after the example of the Saviour, let prayer and praise employ your earliest hours." Who amongst us will not rise up early in the morning when he has a long and important journey to undertake, or a weighty business to accomplish; and shall we not rise early when we have a race to run, and a work to perform, on which our everlasting happiness depends? Are not we who profess to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we who profess to look for a judgment to come,

for a joyful resurrection, for a glorious immortality, are not we deeply concerned to redeem the time, and to consecrate our earliest hours to the service of our God? "We are not of the night," saith the apostle, "nor of darkness, therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

To those of my hearers who are convinced that it is their duty and interest to rise early, but who are as yet strangers to the practice, I would say, begin without delay, begin with to-morrow's sun. The great adversary of souls will dissuade you from the attempt, and your own self-indulgent nature will plead for a little sleep, a little slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep. Hearken not to such persuasions. Be no longer tied and bound by the chains of sloth, but, through Christ strengthening you, burst its bonds asunder, and cast away its cords from you.

To you, my young friends, who are just entering on the journey of life, I would more especially recommend the practice of early rising and early devotion. Learn to value and improve your morning hours, consecrate them to the service of your Saviour and your God. Lose not the choisest portion of every day in unnecessary sleep. "Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience, inherit the promises." Seek the Lord early in life, and early in the day,

and you shall find him to your everlasting comfort. He will be your sun and your shield, your strong hold, whereunto you may always resort. He will guide you by his counsel, and afterwards receive you into glory.

I would in an especial manner recommend this imitation of the Redeemer to those young disciples who are this day about to draw near to the table of the Lord for the first time, and to behold there the memorials of a Saviour's love. I congratulate you, my dear young friends, on the wise choice you have made. You have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from you. See that you endure unto the end. See that you give your hearts unto God, and that you join yourselves to him in a cause which shall never be broken. Look to that compassionate Shepherd who gathereth the lambs with his arm, and carrieth them in his bosom, and gently leadeth those that are with young.

SERMON XIV.

ISAIAH LVIII. 13, 14.

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

THIS passage of holy scripture relates to a subject of peculiar importance, and calls for deep and serious attention. It enforces the observance of a commandment which was delivered from the earliest period of the world—a commandment proclaimed from Mount Sinai with thunders, and lightnings, and the voice of a trumpet sounding louder and louder—a commandment afterwards "written by the finger of God."

May the Holy Spirit, who alone can give the increase, accompany us with his blessing whilst we consider:—

I. Our obligations to observe the sabbath-day.
II. The manner in which it ought to be observed.
III. The advantages of observing it.

I. Few arguments are necessary to prove that some portion of that time which God hath given us should be consecrated to his more immediate service. What can be more evident than that mankind, who enjoy so many blessings in common, should assemble in all the different parts of the world to offer up their prayers and praises, with united hearts and voices, to the Father of their spirits, and the Giver of all their mercies? It was necessary, therefore, that a particular day should be set apart for this solemn purpose. Accordingly, we find that no sooner were "the heavens and the earth finished, and all the host of them," than "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his works which he created and made."

The command to sanctify the Sabbath was renewed on Mount Sinai with every circumstance of grandeur and solemnity. Thunders rolled, and lightnings flashed, the mountain

quaked, the multitude trembled, the Lord of Hosts descended, clouds and darkness were round about him, and a voice was heard proclaiming those memorable words, which shall never pass away; and amongst the rest, "Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy."

The observance of one day in seven was designed to be a solemn memorial of the creation of the world throughout all ages, and an open acknowledgment of every people, and nation, and kindred, and tongue, that they worship and adore that great and glorious Being "who created heaven and the things that therein are, and the earth and the things that therein are, and the sea and the things that therein are." The sabbath was designed to commemorate the divine wisdom, and power, and goodness, in the creation of the world. It was designed to furnish all ranks and conditions of men with an opportunity of advancing their spiritual interests, of preparing for the everlasting world, and securing their eternal salvation. The command of the Most High is addressed to all the inhabitants of the earth, "Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy." This command is binding on persons of every age and condition. None can plead exemption. Whosoever views his own body, which is so fearfully and wonderfully made, or considers

the immortal spirit which is lodged within him, may see that he carries about with him a perpetual monitor, urging him, with still small voice, to obey this command of his Creator.

By the same authority, which at first appointed the observance of the seventh day as a day of rest, the sabbath has been transferred from the last to the first day of the week, in memory of the resurrection of our Divine Redeemer, and is now called by that endearing name, "The Lord's day." The very name reminds us of our best and dearest friend, of him who is Lord of lords, of him who has redeemed us unto God with his blood, of him who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. On this sacred day the glorious victory was obtained over satan, death, and hell. The Saviour of mankind completed the great work of redemption. On this sacred day Jesus arose triumphant from the dead, and came forth from his tomb, conquering and to conquer. On this sacred day he met his assembled disciples after his resurrection, pronounced those sweet words, "Peace be unto you;" and, to convince them that it was he himself, shewed unto them the print of the nails in his hands and feet. On this sacred day the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, and gave rich gifts unto men. On

this sacred day the followers of Jesus have been accustomed, from the earliest ages of the church, to meet together to worship the God of their salvation, to hear his holy word read and preached, to receive the precious memorials of a Redeemer's love, and to make their contributions for the poor of his flock. Well, therefore, may we observe this memorable day as our christian sabbath, the day on which we commemorate the work of creation and the work of redemption, the day on which we are required to "offer and present ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a holy, reasonable, and lively sacrifice," to our Creator, our Redeemer and Sanctifier.

We are bound to observe this precious day in confirmation of our common faith. The sabbath is a public monument of the resurrection of our Lord; and, as it has been observed in every period of the christian church, it leads us up from sabbath to sabbath, till we arrive at the very morning on which our Lord arose from the dead. It presents to our view that very body which was "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." It presents to our view the print of the nails in his hands, and of the spear in his side, and almost constrains us to exclaim with the apostles, "Christ is risen indeed."

The christian sabbath may be regarded as

the pillar which supports the temple of piety. If this pillar be shaken, the temple itself totters. If this pillar be overthrown, the temple falls to the ground. The interests of the individual, and the interests of the community, the claims of him who created us, and of him who bought us with his blood, combine to enforce the important duty of observing the sabbath.

The violation of the sabbath is a violation of the laws of God and man, tends to subvert the foundations of society, and to introduce general disorder and confusion. The sabbath is the rich man's safeguard, and the poor man's refuge. Were our sabbaths abolished, and our houses of prayer shut up, even for a short time, such consequences would ensue as would convince the most thoughtless of the value of the sabbath, and the importance of the house of prayer. Not many years ago an attempt was made in France to abolish the sabbath, and to substitute the theatre for the sanctuary. And what was the result? No man's person or property was in safety for an hour. Robberies and murders were the common occurrences of the day. The history of that horrible period is written in blood. The rulers of the country, all infidels as they were, shuddered at the tremendous effects of their impiety, and hastened to revive the sabbath, and to

rebuild the altars of religion. Every friend, therefore, to order and good government, is concerned to preserve the rights of the sabbath inviolate.

The Christian contends for the preservation of their rights on higher principles, and from holier motives. He regards them as of vital importance, as closely connected with the glory of God, and the salvation of man. The individual who robs his fellow men of their silver and gold is branded as the outcast of society, and shall no disgrace attach to him who robs his Maker of the honour due unto his name, robs him of the hours appropriated to his service, and violates the day which the Most High has so solemnly commanded to be kept holy? The man who rebels against his lawful sovereign is doomed, and justly doomed, to the severest punishment which human laws can inflict; and shall he who rebels against the Sovereign Majesty of heaven and earth, by violating his sacred day, pass uncensured and unpunished? No, my brethren, the Judge of all the earth marks this crime with peculiar tokens of his displeasure.

There is no transgression so frequently punished in the present life. How often have the judgments of the Lord speedily overtaken the sabbath-breaker, and cut him off in the very act of transgressing the divine

command. What a large and fearful catalogue might be drawn up of such offenders thus cut off! Do not such judgments proclaim, as with a voice of thunder, "Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy."

To what amazing events and inestimable blessings does the sabbath refer! It looks back to the creation of the world: it records the resurrection of the Redeemer: it points to the general resurrection: and prepares for the everlasting rest which remaineth for the people of God. Whoever has any sins to confess, whoever has any mercies to implore, whoever has any wants to supply, whoever has any benefits to acknowledge, is concerned to "call the sabbath, the holy of the Lord, honourable," and to join the assemblies who "meet together to render thanks for the great benefits which they have received at the hands" of their Heavenly Father, "to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul." What, therefore, can be more evident than our obligations to "remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy?"

II. We come now to consider *The right manner of observing the sabbath.* And here my text shall be our guide. It contains the fullest statement with regard to the duties of

the sabbath which is found throughout the whole of the scriptures.

First, it states the things from which we are to abstain. It requires us to "turn away our foot from the sabbath," from trampling on it, as the profane do, and from travelling on it, as too many nominal Christians do. It requires us to refrain from doing any ordinary work, or attending to any worldly concern, on that sacred day; to guard against spending any part of it in idle pleasures and recreations, in sloth and indolence, or in vain and trifling conversation.

We should duly prepare for the sabbath. At the close of every week we should say to ourselves, as Moses said to the children of Israel, "To-morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord, bake that which ye will bake to-day, and seethe that ye will seethe." We are required to honour the sabbath above all other days, to call the holy of the Lord, honourable, to delight in its duties, and rejoice and be glad at every return of its hallowed hours; "not doing our own ways," not walking in the ways of our heart, or in the sight of our eyes; but laying aside all our worldly concerns, and consecrating the day wholly and entirely to the service of God.

The sabbath may be profaned, as far as we ourselves are concerned, by indulging

thoughts unsuitable to the day, by suffering our minds to wander through the world and the things of the world, and our "hearts to be overcharged with the cares of this life," and the desires of its perishing possessions. The Lord of the sabbath "searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins," and no service will find acceptance in his sight which is not performed "in spirit and in truth." "Holiness to the Lord" should be inscribed on every hour of the sabbath, and the beauty of holiness should shed a lustre over all its employments. Whoever would keep holy the sabbath-day must guard against worldly thoughts and worldly desires, remembering that "all hearts are open, and all desires known," to our Heavenly Father, and that "from him no secrets are hid." The sabbath is polluted by sunday visitings, sunday feastings, and sunday idleness. It is, moreover, profaned by light and worldly conversation. "Not speaking thine own words" is part of the duty required in my text. We must not allow ourselves the same liberty of speech on the Lord's day as on other days. Christians must abstain from all discourse on the sabbath about their farms and their merchandize, about buying, and selling, and getting gain. We should enter on the sabbath with the prayer of the Psalmist, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep

the door of my lips." All our conversation should have a reference to spiritual things, to the riches of Divine grace and the wonders of Divine love, to the treasures of wisdom which the word of God contains, and to the joys and glories which it reveals.

The duties which we are required to perform on the sabbath are all the various offices of religion. Searching the scriptures, self-examination, and secret and family prayer, should form part of the employment of every sabbath. We are particularly required to assemble for public worship on that sacred day, ourselves and our families, that we may embrace the opportunity of uniting in prayer and praise, of hearing the word of God read and preached, and of commemorating the death and sufferings of our Divine Redeemer, and thus growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Every part of the day is to be consecrated to God. Some who assemble within the courts of the Lord's house on the morning of the sabbath, seldom appear amongst the worshippers at the evening sacrifice. But what says the commandment? "Remember to keep holy the *sabbath-day*." The Lord claims the whole day as his own, from its earliest dawn to its latest close. No worldly business must be suffered to intrude, no worldly

thoughts to interfere, and no worldly pleasure to pollute the sacred day. Every moment of it is more precious than thousands of gold and silver. It bears the stamp of heaven on its wings, and posts to heaven to report how it has been employed on earth. All our sabbaths are recorded in that book of remembrance which shall hereafter be opened in the presence of the assembled universe. Every one of them which has been polluted by worldly thoughts, and worldly discourse, and worldly employments, will then rise up in judgment, and with a voice of thunder call for vengeance against the sabbath-breaker. How nearly, therefore, does it concern us to take heed that we profane not the Lord's-day.

The sabbath demands profound reverence and sacred awe. Had we been present at the creation of the world, and heard the Most High, in his glorious Majesty, calling all things into existence by the word of his power, with what deep veneration should we have exclaimed, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Again, had we been present at the crucifixion of our Divine Redeemer, and seen the sun darkened, the rocks rent, and the graves opened; had we stood by his sepulchre, and beheld the

angel descend from heaven, and roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and seen our Divine Redeemer come forth in all his majesty, with what gratitude and joy should we have exclaimed, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." With such feelings, and with such adorations, it becomes us to observe every returning sabbath.

We come, next, to consider,

III. *The advantages of thus observing the sabbath.* "Then shall thou delight thyself in the Lord."

Here, my brethren, the prophet points out the source of all happiness, the fountain of all joy. In communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, the soul of the believer enjoys that "peace which passeth all understanding." In the consolations of the Holy Spirit he finds "joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Such is the communion and such are the consolations which are the portion of those who "call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable." "Them will I bring to my holy mountain," saith the Lord, "and make them joyful in my house of prayer." The Christian can testify, from his own experience, that he has again

and again been made joyful in the house of prayer, that he has found it good for him to draw nigh unto the Lord on his own day, and in his own house, to "see the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

The sabbath should be regarded with peculiar delight. Shall not "the children of Zion be joyful in their king" on that day on which he has more especially promised to bless them, and "beautify them with his salvation?" Shall they not exclaim with joyful lips, "This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." On this sacred day the Maker of all things rejoiced over the works which his hands had made. On this sacred day the Redeemer of the world rejoiced over the church which he had purchased with his blood. The Holy Spirit rejoiced over the new creation which he formed in the souls of men. How beautiful, my brethren, was the first sabbath! The whole creation was then fresh from the hands of him who "numbereth the stars, and calleth them all by their names"—of him who beheld all the works which he had made, and pronounced them "good." On the first sabbath "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." No jarring note was heard throughout the world; but every part of the creation joined with the first parents of the human race in their song of praise, "O Lord,

how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches."

The blessing of the Most High has accompanied the due observance of the sabbath in every age and in every country. On the holy sabbath thousands and tens of thousands have received life from on high. On the holy sabbath the "glad tidings of salvation" sound through every Christian land. On the holy sabbath the Lord openeth "the wells of salvation," and inviteth every one that thirsteth to come and drink abundantly of the waters of life. He "causeth his people to ride on the high places of the earth," to rise above the world and all its shadows and vanities, and to triumph over the enemies of their salvation. He moreover promises to "feed them with the heritage of Jacob," "with the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth," and to enrich them with all the blessings of the covenant. They shall "lie down in green pastures, and be led by still waters;" and finally, after this life, "be numbered with his saints in glory everlasting." To confirm the truth of this promise, it is added, "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it;" and therefore it must, it will, it shall be accomplished. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

It is our highest interest to observe the

sabbath as my text requires. Some of the wisest of men have remarked that the due observance of the sabbath had the happiest influence on their temporal affairs, insomuch that they could generally tell the success which should attend their undertakings through the week from the manner in which they spent the Lord's-day. This, my brethren, is in exact agreement with the declaration of the Lord, "Them that honour me I will honour." But the sabbath has higher claims upon us than any temporal benefits can prefer. It carries with it the blessings which extend through the countless ages of eternity. It is, in a peculiar manner, "the accepted time, and the day of salvation." It brings with it in rich abundance "the means of grace and the hope of glory." Wherever it is duly observed it is a type of the everlasting sabbath. At the close of every week it shines upon us with its peaceful and refreshing beams, and with a still small voice invites us into the presence of our Saviour and our God. What sound more grateful to the Christian's ear than the sound of the sabbath bell, which summons him to the house of prayer, and seems to proclaim, "Come, for all things are now ready." No wonder that the pious poor should have been heard to exclaim, "Oh that the blessed sabbath would never end." To them it is indeed a day of peculiar delight, a day of holy rest,

a day of sweet communion with their best and dearest Friend, a day of preparation for an endless sabbath. They know from their own experience that "the sabbath was made for man"—for his present comfort and his future glory. Wherever the sabbath is neglected, God is neglected, the soul is neglected, heaven is neglected. There the Judge of all the earth has a controversy with the transgressors of his law, and sends amongst them the sword, and pestilence, and famine. The individual who profanes the sabbath cannot prosper, the family who profane the sabbath cannot prosper, the kingdom, the town, the parish, which profanes the sabbath cannot prosper. Oh, no! The Lord will not suffer his rights to be invaded with impunity. He will not suffer the sabbath-breaker to go unpunished, whatever be his rank in society, whether he be numbered amongst the rich and great ones of the earth, or be found amongst the lowest of the sons of men. If we love ourselves, therefore, if we love our families, if we love our country, it concerns us to keep the sabbath from polluting it.

Let all who hear me this day examine themselves, whether they "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." What, my brethren, are your sabbath thoughts? What are your sabbath conversations? What are your sabbath employments? No merely out-

ward observance of the day will satisfy the requirements of the heart-searching God, of him who "requireth truth in the inward parts." He requireth us to be "in the spirit on the Lord's-day," to "call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words." Be persuaded, therefore, my beloved brethren, thus to observe this sacred day. Remember who it is that commands you to keep it holy; even the Lord, who giveth you all that you have, and all that you are; the Lord who "will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Remember the rich blessings which are promised to those who keep the sabbath from polluting it—blessings of every kind, temporal and spiritual—personal blessings, domestic blessings, national blessings, and all these secured by a promise which can never fail, "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

SERMON XV.

PSALM XXXI. 5.

Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

We find our blessed Lord using these words when expiring on the cross. This gives peculiar weight to them, and points them out as worthy of our deep and serious attention. Accordingly, this prayer has been uttered with trembling voice and faltering accents, at the departing hour, by many who now sleep in Jesus; and has been, as it were, the passport to the realms of bliss. May the Holy Spirit accompany our meditations with his blessings, whilst we proceed to consider,

I. The treasure to be committed.
II. The Being to whose care it is committed.
III. The encouragement to commit it to his care.

I. The treasure to be committed into the hands of God is the immortal soul; that soul which was created after the Divine image; that soul which is endowed with such vast capacities and such boundless desires; that soul which has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; that soul which is destined to exist through the countless ages of eternity. The whole creation does not contain a more precious treasure than this. All the gold of Ophir is not to be compared with it. The other parts of the creation, the sun, and moon, and stars, the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, were brought into existence by a single word: but in the formation of man, we find the ever-blessed Trinity holding, as it were, a solemn council; "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Thus we find the human soul created but a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour. Sin, however, produced a fatal change. It defaced the image of God in which man was created. It defiled the conscience, hardened the heart, and blinded the mind. Still the Father of Mercies did not forsake the work of his hands. He beheld the noble fabric in ruins, and out of his boundless compassion determined to restore it to glory, and honour, and immortality. The high price which he paid

for man's redemption, marks in the strongest manner the value of the soul. When the Lord Jehovah gave his only begotten Son to suffer, bleed, and die as a ransom for sinners, he proclaimed to principalities and powers, to angels and archangels, and to the whole intelligent creation, how highly he estimated that for which he was willing to make such a costly sacrifice. Our immortality, my brethren, stamps an infinite value on the soul. The soul of man never dies. When separated from the body it still lives, thinks, and feels, and will continue to live, think, and feel, for ever and ever. The sun shall decay, the stars shall fade, the earth shall be burnt up, and the visible heavens shall pass away; but the soul shall survive them all, and flourish in immortal youth. After millions of millions of ages have rolled away, the duration of the soul will be no nearer an end than it is at the present hour. It will still have an eternity before it, an eternity of unspeakable happiness or inconceivable misery. What heart, therefore, can conceive, or what tongue express, the value of an immortal soul. Such is the treasure spoken of in my text.

What, then, are we to understand by committing it into the hand of God? This implies a full persuasion of our immortality. The Christian knows that when his dust

returns to the dust as it was, his spirit will return to God who gave it; and therefore he is anxiously solicitous to secure its favourable reception in the world of spirits. He knows that in the presence of God there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore, and his earnest desire is to be received into that presence. He feels little concern as to where his mortal part shall be deposited, whether it shall mingle with the clods of the valley, or be consigned to a splendid sepulchre: but he is tremblingly alive to the interests of his never-dying soul. Whatever becomes of the casket, his great concern is that the precious jewel which it contains may be safely lodged.

To commit the soul to God further implies a belief that he is willing to receive it, that it is already reconciled to him through the blood of his Son, that it is pardoned, justified, sanctified, and made meet for glory, and thus prepared to join the glorious assembly above. The dying Christian regards his soul as an inestimable treasure, and therefore his great solicitude is to have it safely lodged in the hands of God, in the hands of one who is both able and willing to preserve it for ever. This leads us to consider,

II. The Being to whose care it is committed.

There are only two beings in the universe

to one or other of whom the soul of man must depart, when separated from the body; the one the Lord of Glory, the other the prince of darkness. The one receives the souls of the faithful after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, into joy and felicity which never ends; and the other hurries the souls of the wicked to that place of torments from which there is no release. It is the Christian's fervent prayer and heart's desire, that whenever his soul shall depart from the body, it may be received into his heavenly Father's hands, and be presented unto him without spot, through that precious Saviour who is gone before to prepare a place for all his faithful followers. The being to whom the Christian commends his soul is the God of his salvation, his Redeemer; "Thou hast Redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." The Lord has bought him with a price, and therefore will not cast away what he has so dearly purchased. He is, moreover, the "God of truth," faithful to his promises. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away." All his promises "in Christ Jesus are yea and amen." The Christian has abundant promises to assure him that the Lord God of truth will not forsake him in the hour of his extremity; but that when he passes through the valley

of the shadow of death, this kind Shepherd will be with him, and his rod and his staff comfort him. He to whom the dying Christian commends his spirit, is represented in Scripture as "the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation," as "gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth;" as he who "was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." He who is the God of truth, will not, cannot, be unmindful of the "covenant which is ordered in all things and sure;" that covenant by which he has graciously bound himself to "pardon all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his Gospel, "to "blot out their iniquities," to "create clean hearts and to renew right spirits within them," to "guide them by his counsel, and afterwards receive them into glory." These promises stand firm as the everlasting hills. The children of men may deceive us. They may promise and not perform; or they may have the desire to help us without the ability. But the God of truth can neither deceive nor be deceived. He "is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it, or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?". He is, moreover, "The Lord," the Lord of heaven and earth,

whose wisdom is infinite, and whose power is irresistible. "He doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of the earth." He is above all, and in all, and through all. He is the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him throughout all generations. Well, therefore, may the dying Christian say, with the apostle, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

III. Powerful is the encouragement which the Christian has to make this surrender of his soul into the hands of God at the hour of his departure. What the God of his salvation has already done for him is a sure pledge of what he will yet do for him. The Christian may confidently say, "I am thine, O Lord, altogether thine; thine by creation. It was thou who didst form this body of mine, which is so fearfully and wonderfully made. It was thou who didst give me a soul capable of knowing, loving, and glorifying thee for ever. It is thou, too, who hast preserved me ever since I was born, who didst sustain me while I yet hung upon my mother's breasts, and who hast guarded, protected, and fed me all the days of my life. It is thou, moreover, who hast redeemed me by the blood of thy beloved

Son, and I know that thou wilt not cast me off in the agonies of death, but wilt give thine angels charge concerning me, to conduct me safely to 'the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,' for 'thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.'" Christians were once children of wrath like others, alienated from God, and without hope in the world; but, through faith in Christ Jesus, they are made the children of God, and have a good hope through grace, a hope full of immortality. The Father of their spirits found out a ransom for them, and laid help on one that is mighty, and thus delivered them from the pit of destruction. He called them by the power of his word; he justified them by the blood and righteousness of his Son, and sanctified them by the influences of his Spirit. He gave up the richest treasure in heaven for their ransom; he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, so that we are no longer our own, but are bought with a price. This wonderful display of divine love encourages the Christian to commit his soul with confidence into the hands of his heavenly Father. We may rest assured that he who so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life, will not cast away his faithful

servants when their heart and their flesh faileth them, but will be the strength of their heart and their portion for ever. The promises of God assure us of this. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee," saith the Lord to the afflicted Christian; "be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. Even to old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made and I will bear, even I will carry and will deliver you."

In these promises the penitent believer has as sure an interest as if an angel descended from the throne of God, and presented them to him sealed with the broad seal of heaven. The Lord will not fail to make good his promises in those trying seasons when they are most needed; he will not forsake his redeemed ones in that awful hour, when the sorrows of death compass them around, and the eternal world is opening to their view.

The experience of all past ages testifies that the Lord is with his dying servants,

that he makes all their bed in their sickness, that he gives them strength proportioned to their day, and comes to their relief when all human help is vain. The patriarch Jacob could say, in his dying hour, "I have waited for thy salvation, O God;" and the aged Simeon, when he took the infant Saviour in his arms, could say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Nor are there wanting numerous instances in modern days of Christians triumphing over death, and exulting in the near views of eternity. Hearken, my beloved brethren, to the testimony of one who was cut down in the flower of his age, whilst promising to be made a blessing to the world by his eminent piety and distinguished talents. For the last six weeks of his life he was constantly filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. He would often say, "Oh that I could make you know what I now feel, what I now see! Oh that I could express the thousandth part of that sweetness which I now find in Christ! I would not, for millions of worlds, be now without a Saviour. Death has lost all its terrors. I long to be with Christ." Such, my brethren, is the language of the dying Christian, of him who has fought a good fight, who has finished his course, who has kept the faith. He may

confidently say, when his last hour arrives, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

The Saviour of the world expired with these words upon his lips. He who by his life taught us how to live, has by his death taught us how to die. He has taught us where to look for comfort and support at the hour of death, and into whose hands to commit our departing souls. Greatly shall we need comfort and support at that awful hour—the hour which is to try the sincerity of our faith, the hour which is to separate us for ever from the world, the hour which is to determine our everlasting condition, and either to admit us into the paradise of God, or consign us to outer darkness. Who does not see the necessity of being prepared for such an hour as this?

But it may be asked, wherein does that preparation consist? In "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ;" in abounding in the fruits of the Spirit, in love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; in relying wholly on the merits of the Saviour, and following his example, in fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold on eternal life, in finishing our course with holy resignation.

We see how the blessed Jesus finished his

course, with what perfect resignation to his Father's will, with what unbounded love, even towards those who had nailed him to the cross; and with what entire confidence he commended his spirit into the hands of his Father. This was indeed dying in a manner worthy the Redeemer of the world, and thus has he taught us to die. Our blessed Lord finished his course with prayer, with fervent, frequent, repeated prayer. Prayer too must be our last employment, our refuge, our comfort, our support, our watch-word at the gates of death; we must enter heaven with prayer, and what prayer more suited to that solemn hour than the prayer in my text. "Into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

Our blessed Lord moreover finished his course in the exercise of faith. "He saw of the travail of his soul and was satisfied;" he looked forward to the joy set before him, and endured the cross, despising the shame. Thus too must the Christian finish his course in the full assurance of faith, nothing doubting but that the promises of eternal life and everlasting glory will be abundantly accomplished, and that he will be enabled to triumph over Satan, death, and hell; nothing doubting but that through Christ strengthening him he shall die in peace, and rise in glory.

Our blessed Lord moreover died in the exercise of hope. The language of his heart was, "My flesh shall rest in hope, for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption." The Christian too should die in the exercise of hope, in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection to eternal life; as he is born again to a lively hope, so it becomes him to depart this life as one who is about to enter on an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

Lastly, our Divine Redeemer closed his life with an entire surrender of himself to his Heavenly Father. Thus too does it become us, my brethren, to close our lives, calmly resigning ourselves to the disposal of our merciful and faithful Creator, and committing our souls into his hands as our "all in all."

It concerns us above all things to be found amongst the redeemed of the Lord before our last hour arrives. It will not then be the time to begin to seek for redemption, to seek for pardon, to seek for renewal of our hearts, and to obtain meetness for glory. The whole of our pilgrimage upon earth was given for these important purposes, and shall we defer the great end for which we were created, the great end for which we are preserved, and the great end for which the means of grace and the opportunities of salvation are afforded

us, till the season of pain, of sickness, and of death, overtake us, and the night is closing upon us, in which no man can work? If such be our conduct, have we not abundant reason to fear that we shall have our portion with the unprofitable servants. Then let all amongst us seek redemption now; but where is it to be sought? At the cross of the compassionate Saviour, who has purchased free, plenteous, and complete redemption for the chief of sinners who repent, believe, and live. "It is not the will of our Heavenly Father that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. We are simply required to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, to embrace him in all his offices, and to cleave unto him with full purpose of heart. How unspeakable the value of a true and living faith. It not only saves the sinner from everlasting destruction, but saves him from fear and despair in a dying hour. It gives him to know that he has a Saviour who will be with him in that trying hour, who will strengthen, comfort, and support him when passing through the dark valley, and finally receive him into everlasting habitations. Are all of us, my brethren, possessed of this living faith? What evidences have we to satisfy ourselves and others that we are true believers? What

fruits does our faith produce? Does it overcome the world, does it purify our hearts, does it work by love? The true saving faith of the gospel never fails of producing these effects. It humbles the sinner, it exalts the Saviour, and constrains to the practice of universal holiness. Nearly does it concern us to search and try whether we possess this living faith, whether we believe to the saving of our souls, and whether we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. It will avail us nothing to make profession of the Christian faith unless that profession be attended with a holy and consistent life. If we be indeed amongst the redeemed of the Lord we must shew forth the beauty of holiness in our whole conversation, and testify to all around us that the Saviour has redeemed us from all iniquity, and purified us to himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. This will be the only satisfactory proof that we are true followers of the Lord Jesus, this will be the only effectual preparation for a happy death and a joyful resurrection.

And now, in conclusion, suffer me, my beloved brethren, to address a word of exhortation to those who are yet unprepared for the hour of death, and next to those who are waiting for the coming of their Lord with their lights burning, and their accounts in readiness. There is not in the world a more

affecting sight than that of a sinner trembling on the brink of eternity unconverted, unrenewed, unprepared. Wherever he turns his view, all is darkness and despair. If he looks back on his past life he sees it crowded with worldly cares and worldly pursuits, with folly, and vanity, and sin; he sees time lost, sabbaths abused, salvation neglected, and eternity forgotten. If he looks forward he sees before him an awful tribunal, an offended Judge, and an everlasting hell. No language can describe the wretchedness of his state, and yet to this wretchedness every impenitent sinner is continually exposed. The Spirit of grace again and again calls aloud in these our solemn assemblies, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." "God now commandeth all men every where to repent." The Saviour now invites sinners to come to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. His precious blood cleanses from all sin, but in vain are the invitations of the Saviour, in vain the rich provision which he has made for your redemption, in vain are his promises, in vain are his threatenings, whilst you "will not come to him that ye may have life." Oh! be not such enemies to yourselves, to your eternal interests, to your everlasting welfare, as any longer to neglect the great salvation which is once more

offered you. You may not now see the madness of your conduct. Satan may have blinded your eyes, the world may so engage your hearts and occupy your time, that eternity is wholly shut out from your view; but it will not always be so; the hour is fast approaching when the vail which hides eternity from your sight shall be rent asunder, and you will then see, and feel, and understand, the awful realities which are there treasured up. (What will then be your grief and your remorse?) Conscience even now tells you that you are not ready for the reckoning which awaits you, that you are not prepared to meet your God. When are you to be ready? When are you to be prepared? Is it at some future period? You know not what a day may bring forth. Your souls may this night be required of you. Then what will be your doom? The Spirit of truth has told you. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." Why, therefore, should you delay to apply to the Saviour of sinners, and secure an interest in his merits? Reason and conscience persuade you to this. The Father of Mercies, who has so long borne with you; the compassionate Redeemer, who shed his blood for you; the Holy Spirit, who has so long knocked at the door of your hearts; all persuade you to this. Then no longer resist these gracious persua-

sions; suffer not your eyes to sleep, nor your eye-lids to slumber, till you seek the things which belong unto your peace.

To you, my beloved brethren, who are daily preparing to meet your God, I would say, hold fast your confidence unto the end. Beware of slumbering on your watch, beware of standing still in your Christian race; your watch-word must be onwards, onwards. If you begin to look back, if you begin to conform to the sinful fashions and practices of the world, and to forget the solemn vows which are upon you, all will be lost. The favour of God will be lost, the consolations of the Holy Spirit will be lost, the joys of heaven will be lost, and your immortal souls will be lost, and lost for ever. Or, should you, on your death-bed, be awakened to a sense of your danger, and out of the depths cry unto the Lord, and be heard, yet will you be saved, so as by fire, saved with extreme difficulty; snatched as a brand out of the burning, without any of that sweet peace and well-grounded hope which cast bright rays of glory around the death-bed of the prepared Christian, whilst he offers up the prayer in my text, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Let not this be your case, my Christian brethren; but lay up for yourselves

a good foundation against the time to come. Walk closely and humbly with your God. See that your last days be your best days, and your last hours your happiest hours. Shine as lights in the world. Abound in every good word and work. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity, that so an entrance may be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

THE END.

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